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Saving water — seriously

Jane Mackenzie, Editor

I once lived in a city where the water was turned off between six in the evening and six in the morning. The reason, of course, was to save water, although drought wasn't the problem there. Rumour had it that the system was so old and poorly maintained (and the water was undrinkable anyway) that drastic measures were needed to keep water flowing at all.

How did we cope? We filled the bath with cold water before the curfew and scooped it out in saucepans to use for everything from cooking to flushing the toilet. (And woe betide you if you were filling the bath at 6 pm when the water stopped flowing, and forgot to turn the tap off — you woke up to ominous splashing noises shortly after six the following morning.)

As always, you can get used to just about everything, and we did. But I'm sure most Australians don't want to get to quite such a drastic point, which is why it makes sense to take the current water restrictions in many parts of the country seriously. And why many people are turning again to the old icon of the Australian landscape: a rainwater tank.

Today's rainwater tank has had something of a transformation, though (see page 8). It's now designed for city and suburban situations as well as out in the country, and comes in all shapes and sizes, made out of all kinds of materials. You can put it on top of your house, next to it or under it, or even underground or disguised as a wall in your backyard.

It's just one solution to water shortages, but any steps we can take in the right direction are steps away from a more severe kind of water rationing. (And yes, the city in question now has 24-hour, drinkable running water.)

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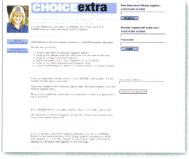

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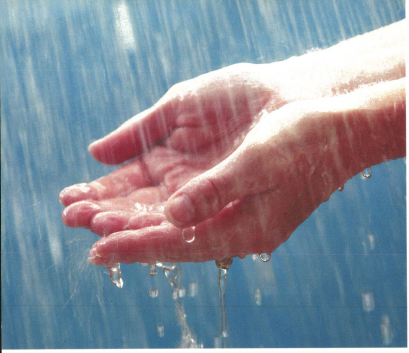

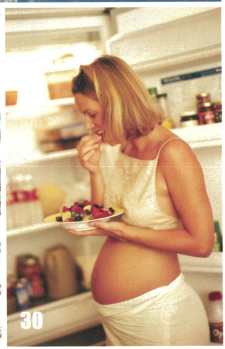

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Photo: Ute Wegmann

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Aspirin — drug or essential nutrient?

It might sound a very strange idea — aspirin an essential part of the human diet? But that's the view one aspirin expert outlined in an issue of *New Scientist* earlier this year.

There's much evidence that aspirin can play a positive role in reducing the risk of heart disease, including heart attack, and also strokes. In fact current Australian therapeutic guidelines indicate that low-dose aspirin should be taken by anyone with a history of coronary heart disease or a stroke, unless pre-existing medical conditions rules this out (such as haemophilia, severe kidney or liver disease, peptic ulcer, stomach inflammation or aspirin sensitivity).

Recent studies show aspirin may also have an ability to reduce the risk of various types of cancer — reductions in the risk of prostate, bowel, ovarian, breast and stomach cancers have been documented. Evidence also suggests that aspirin may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

Why should aspirin show this broad spectrum of positive health benefits? The answer may lie in the essential nature of salicylate in the human diet (salicylate is the 'do-good' chemical produced by the body from aspirin). The theory says modern diets lack enough salicylate. Dietary changes are one aspect — we're not eating the amount of fruit and vegetables we should.

Another factor relates to many fruits and vegies producing salicylate in response to physical damage, disease or pest attack. With consumer demand for perfect, blemish-free produce combined with pesticide use, it's possible that today's fruits and vegies need to produce less salicylate. On this point, *New Scientist* cited research showing that organic vegetable soups contained almost six times the salicylate of non-organic ones.

The benefits of a diet high in fresh fruit and vegies are legion, and there's clearly a beneficial effect in taking low-dose aspirin for certain diseases, but is this enough to make salicylate a candidate for essential nutrient status? There seems at least enough evidence to warrant further research, and in the meantime it's another reason to aim for at least five servings of fruit and vegies a day.

Don't self-medicate with aspirin. Before taking any over-the-counter medication on a long-term basis, talk to your doctor. In particular, aspirin can have serious side effects and isn't suitable for everyone.

TAMARA GRAHAM

Can you help?

READER CAR REVIEWS

If you're in the market for a new car, you want as much information as possible on the model you're interested in. How does it perform in different driving situations? Do the features work well? What's it like for space and noise?

Our reader car reviews (see CHOICE, July and August 2004, for the latest) try to answer these questions, and we need your help again for the next round of reviews.

If you've bought (**new, not secondhand**) one of the models on the right within the last 12 months or so (unless otherwise stated), and are willing to fill in a brief survey for us, please let us know by **November 22, 2004:**

- **Write** to CHOICE, Car review, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.
- **Fax** to CHOICE car review, (02) 9577 3377.
- **Email** to car-review@choice.com.au.

Please tell us which of the following models you can review for us, when you bought it, and your email address (preferably), fax number or mailing address.

- Ford Focus.
- Ford Territory.
- Honda Accord.
- Hyundai Elantra.
- Mazda 3.
- Mitsubishi Pajero.
- Mitsubishi Lancer (since October 2003).
- Nissan Patrol.
- Nissan Pulsar.
- Toyota Corolla.
- Toyota Kluger.
- Toyota Landcruiser.
- Toyota Prado.

HAVE YOU GOT UNCLAIMED SUPER?

Australians have more than $7 billion hidden away in over 4.8 million separate 'lost' superannuation accounts — chances are that some of this super stash could be yours.

Australia's Unclaimed Super Fund (AUSfund) offers a free search service of over 1.3 million super accounts through its website: **www.unclaimedsuper.com.au**. Simply enter your name and date of birth, and you'll be told if there are any records suggesting you've got some forgotten super funds.

The October/November issue of CHOICE *Money & Rights* has more on reclaiming lost super as well as money from bank accounts, insurance and even shares from a liquidated company.

Which brand at the factory outlet?

Do you love bargain hunting in a factory outlet shop where discontinued lines or slightly imperfect stuff are often sold at a greatly reduced price? Belinda, a CHOICE staff member, always thought herself a savvy shopper, but a recent shopping trip to the Sheridan factory outlet shop in Homebush Bay (Sydney) left her feeling duped.

Belinda had wanted to buy Sheridan towels and bedlinen, but noticed once she got home that the familiar Sheridan branding was missing. When she rang to ask about this, staff told her she'd bought towels from the Sheridan Factory Outlet (SFO) brand, which differ in quality and colour from Sheridan towels. They also said they were cheaper because they didn't have the Sheridan branding.

But that was exactly what Belinda was after in a Sheridan factory outlet: the Sheridan brand. She didn't check the brand label while in the shop because she assumed a Sheridan factory outlet would only have Sheridan products for sale. But that's obviously not the case.

Sheridan told us it does have discontinued, excess and slightly imperfect Sheridan products for sale in its factory outlet stores, though perhaps not always the full range.

The SFO range of products, it says, serves to offer the company's factory outlet customers a full range of less expensive products, as "the most important factor" for these shoppers is value. For some of its customers, perhaps, but Belinda was there for what we think most people would expect from a factory outlet: the usual brand selling at cheaper prices because it's damaged or discontinued, for example.

The moral? If you're after a particular brand, check the packaging and labels to make sure you get what you want, even in a brand's supposed factory outlet.

TAMARA GRAHAM

AUSTRAL IMAGES

Taking the bait

It's one of the oldest tricks in the shop sale's book — advertise a product that you can't provide to get the customers in the door. It's called bait advertising, it's annoying and it's a contravention of the Trade Practices Act.

Recently the Federal Court made orders against a very big fish. In 2002 the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) took action against companies and individuals in the Harvey Norman group, accusing it of bait advertising when it undertook to sell accounting software Quicken Quickbooks for $199, with bundled bonus software worth $900, in the rush just prior to the introduction of the GST.

The ACCC alleged that this promotion was advertised when the parties concerned were well aware they didn't have sufficient software to meet consumer demand. *The Age* reports that at the time Gerry Harvey admitted that while they'd ordered 2000 Quickbooks, 20,000 would have been a better number.

The Federal Court found in favour of the ACCC and Harvey Norman has agreed to pay $270,000 towards the ACCC's legal costs. It will also continue a review of its trade practices compliance program with the assistance of an independent professional, including an annual audit, for three years.

If you suspect you've been lured into a shop by similar tactics, first write to the store, showing copies of paperwork like advertisements, catalogues or printouts of online deals, and any receipts if you made a purchase. Note the dates you received the advertising and when you went to the store, and also list the products the store tried to sell you. If you're not satisfied with the result, you could try the office of consumer affairs or fair trading in your state.

Can you help?

WORKING WITH TRADESPEOPLE

We're currently working on a article about consumer experiences with tradespeople and we'd like to hear from you. If you've used a plumber, electrician, builder, carpenter or other tradesperson lately, please let us know about your experiences, both good and bad.

Were you happy with the quotes, contract, workmanship, reliability, outcome?

Did you encounter any problems and if so, how easy were they to get fixed?

Please write to *Hassle-free tradespeople*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email tradespeople@choice.com.au by November 15, 2004. Thanks for your help.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

FAT COFFEE

Black coffee has virtually no calories, no fat and no carbohydrates. Even a dollop of low-fat milk and a teaspoon of sugar boost the nutrition numbers only slightly, reports the US *Consumer Reports*. But those frappa-, cappa-, mocha-thingies? "Don't fool yourself," says the magazine, which took a look at these hot and iced coffee drinks from Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts. "One of them can provide more than one-fourth of the total calories and more than one-third of the fat most people should consume in a day."

NO PAYOUT FOR THAWED DOG

While researching for an article on pet insurance, our sister organisation in the UK came across an interesting case that illustrates how it's never a good idea to try to hoodwink an insurer. *Which?* magazine reports the case of a man who saw a dead dog that had been run over. He took it home, put it in the freezer and took out a pet insurance policy. After making two monthly payments, he claimed the payout for a dead pet (£1500 at the time). But the vet who had to certify the death became suspicious when he found frozen patches in the defrosted dog. Confronted, the claimant admitted his fraud and the insurance company recorded a black mark on his records — which are shared among insurers — to show he'd made a fraudulent claim.

yourletters

TAMARA GRAHAM

Don't cover the instructions!

Dispensing advice (CHOICE, September 2004) was a useful look at the quality of advice provided by pharmacists regarding over-the-counter medications. I have another slightly different issue with pharmacists.

I've fallen ill several times recently and discovered for myself how variable pharmacists' advice about prescription medications can be. Particularly worrying is the way some pharmacists attach labels so that they cover critical information about a medication, and then compound the problem by not passing on to the consumer information the manufacturer supplies.

I dealt with three different pharmacists. One provided ideal service, another mediocre, and another very poor, such as covering up directions to keep an antibiotic eye drop refrigerated.

The good news is that when I wrote to the Pharmacy Board of Victoria, not only did it respond positively, supplying me with its prescription protocols (which, if followed by pharmacists, would have satisfied all my concerns), it also, with my permission, published my letter prominently in its newsletter to pharmacists, *The Circular*, as an educational tool.

I would be very disappointed if pharmacist-owned pharmacies were to disappear as a result of competition from supermarket chains. However, if they are to survive, consumer complaints and articles like yours must be heeded.

Jan Lacey, via email

Outback camper lives up to its name

After reading the letter 'Unhappy campers' by Robert and Vicki Sanderson in the September 2004 issue of CHOICE I feel compelled to respond and provide a counterview on the Outback camper.

After a long process of analysis and elimination, I bought a Jayco Dove Outback series camper trailer in November last year. This has been my first experience with caravans of any type. Since then I've used the camper extensively, including for a 10,000 km trip through the outback in May and June this year, which involved long distances over typical outback roads. Most are corrugated and either sandy or made from gravel and stone — a challenge for any trailer.

The net result from the 10,000 km of outback travel was a broken plastic tap on the water tank. Obviously this does need better protection from flying stones. Apart from that, I experienced no other damage or malfunction of any equipment.

While I'm not in a position to comment on the Sanderson's experience or the CTTT decision, I don't agree that the term 'Outback' should be removed. I also don't agree that the camper isn't constructed for the conditions it's promoted to cope with.

On the latter point, the instructional material provided with the camper when I purchased it was quite adequate and warned about the limitations of the camper. Similarly, the Jayco dealer provided a fair and honest explanation of the camper's capabilities and limitations, before purchase and on delivery.

In my experience the Jayco Outback camper delivers what it promises, as long as you follow the operational guidelines provided.

John Meert
Canberra, ACT

THUMBS UP!

Jean Porter, via email, gives a thumbs-up to **Barry**, the senior pharmacist at **Soul Pattinson, Westfield Hornsby** (NSW), who, in contrast to some of the experiences we reported on in our September issue, always explains effects and side effects of medicines, checks what other medication the family is taking and generally provides a lot more advice about medications than Jean gets from her prescribing doctor.

Keira, via email, awards a thumbs-up to **NIVEA**, which sent her a written apology and $10 worth of Coles vouchers after she returned a lip balm she wasn't happy with, even though it had only cost $3. "NIVEA went over and above what I expected and I really appreciate it."

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Jan Lacey, receives *The Computer CHOICE Computer Troubleshooter*, or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 34 to 36.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.

Saving WATER

LEE WILGAMAN

It's time we stopped wasting precious drinking water on the garden and for toilet-flushing. Installing a rainwater tank is a step in the right direction.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Rainwater tanks are** *no longer just huge, round and ugly; they come in all shapes and sizes to suit the urban and suburban home.*
- **Watering the garden** *and washing the car with rainwater make sense and cut your consumption of mains water. But bigger savings can be made if you connect the tank to your toilet, washing machine or hot water system.*

Australia is the driest inhabited continent and predictions are that the future is likely to get hotter and drier. So it's all the more frightening that, per person, we're the biggest water consumers in the world.

But drinking water is scarce. Of all the water in the world, only 1% is fresh water available for use. So it's hard to justify that we waste so much of this precious resource on things that don't really require good drinking water. Garden irrigation and toilet flushing, for example, apparently guzzle up around half the water we consume.

Using rainwater for these things, or recycled greywater from our baths and laundries, would make much more sense.

HARVESTING THE RAIN

In the past, rainwater tanks were a common feature of the Australian landscape, but they've almost disappeared from our cities now. The majority of Australian households get their water from a reticulated supply (mains or town water). In the 1990s, 16% of households used a rainwater tank and for 13% it was their main source of drinking water.

In recent years, however, the long-lasting drought in many parts of the country and widespread water restrictions have drawn attention to water conservation issues and put rainwater tanks right back onto urban agendas. Many local councils, water suppliers and state governments have been encouraging residents to install a rainwater tank, often with the offer of a rebate.

THE BENEFITS OF A RAINWATER TANK

The potential benefits of installing a rainwater tank are plentiful, and you don't need to live in a wet or tropical area to reap them. South Australia, the country's driest state, has the highest rate of rainwater tank usage. More than half the households there have one, and for more than a third it's their main source of drinking water.

With a rainwater tank, you'll:

- Collect most of the rain (around 80%) that falls onto the areas of your roof you have connected to gutters and downpipes into your tank. For example, if 10 mm of rain falls on to 100 m^2 of roof you'll 'harvest' about 800 L of rainwater. That's about as much as an average Sydney household of three would use in a day if they made no efforts to save water. If they did, they'd get their consumption down to around 500–600 L a day.
- Reduce your consumption of mains water and, in the long term, cut your water bill. Your water supplier may be able to give you an indication of the savings you can expect.
- Lower your impact on the environment by

reducing your demand on mains water as well as the amount of stormwater runoff into rivers and oceans.

- 'Harvest' water that tastes better and is generally less salty, which is better for appliances and plants.

BEFORE YOU START

If you're interested in installing a rainwater tank, contact your local council, water supplier and health department (if you want to drink the water) first to find out which rules and regulations apply in your local area that could affect your decision.

You may need to submit a development or building application; or there may be restrictions on the tank's location, colour, height and labelling; or noise regulations for a pump may apply. Your water supplier or a licensed plumber should be able to advise you on plumbing regulations, and your health department on issues about drinking rainwater and preventing mosquitoes breeding.

These initial inquiries should also establish whether you're entitled to any cash rebates or bill reductions. Rebates can range from $50 to $650 for the installation of a rainwater tank and depend on the size of the tank and whether it's connected to a toilet and/or washing machine.

TANK-TO-TOILET OR JUST FOR THE GARDEN?

Using the rainwater you collect for outdoor purposes only is the easiest scenario. Apart from the obligatory checks with your council and water supplier, you probably just need the tank supplier to install it and don't need a licensed plumber if there's no connection to the mains water supply. Your water savings won't be huge, but you will save the drinking water you used to pay for to water the garden, wash the car or top up the pool.

Using the rainwater also for toilet-flushing, the washing machine or any other indoor use will increase your water savings substantially. But to do this, you need a licensed plumber to connect the tank to your mains water supply (so you can still wash a load if the tank is empty, for example) and the approval of the relevant authorities.

If you're allowed to connect your rainwater tank to the mains water supply, you're likely to need a backflow prevention device so your rainwater won't contaminate the mains supply if the water pressure changes suddenly and the water tries to flow backwards. Your water supplier may provide this free.

GOOD ENOUGH TO DRINK?

Many water suppliers and health authorities in Australia recommend you *don't* drink the water you collect in a rainwater tank if you have access to mains water. But this is probably just to be on the safe side, because no authority can guarantee the quality of the rainwater you collect.

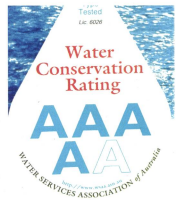
However, reports of illness associated with rainwater tanks are relatively infrequent, and public health studies in SA (the state with the highest rainwater usage rate) have also failed to identify a link. So it's up to you.

Rainwater is generally regarded as fit to drink if it smells, tastes and looks fine. In areas with heavy industry, smelters or heavy traffic, atmospheric pollutants could pose a problem, as could potential pollutants on your roof, such as chemicals from paint, bird droppings, dust and leaves. For more potential hazards on your roof, see page 12.

Small adjustments, big savings

If you're unable to invest in a rainwater tank or greywater system, you can still save water (and energy costs, if you save on hot water) by changing your habits or installing small water-saving devices around the house and garden.

- Cut down your time in the shower.
- Install a water-efficient showerhead, and a flow regulator (restrictor) or aerator to taps to reduce the amount of water that comes out — your council or water supplier may offer rebates.
- Install a dual-flush toilet (or put a brick in the cistern) to reduce the amount of water used for flushing.
- Look for a water-rating label when buying appliances such as a showerhead, washing machine (a front loader uses less water), dishwasher and toilet. Together these four account for over 80% of indoor residential water use. The more As on the label, the more water-efficient the appliance is, up to a maximum of five (see below).
- Only run full loads in the dishwasher and washing machine (unless it has a half-load program).
- Fix all leaking taps.
- Plant so-called 'water-wise' or native plants that need less water, and use mulch.
- If you're allowed to use an irrigation system in your garden, use a tap timer.
- If you're installing a new irrigation system, choose a drip system with a rain or soil moisture sensor.
- For hand-watering, use a trigger nozzle or spray wand.



TAMARA GRAHAM

PRACTISING WHAT I PREACH

Megan and Peter see their Colorbond tank as a design feature that complements their 1920s weatherboard house.

About a year ago, when they renovated their home, Peter Dixon and Megan Kessler put in a rainwater tank and had it connected to the plumbing. They thought it their duty to do so, as both work in environmental management.

"We'd been arguing professionally to improve our river systems for years," said Peter, "and we felt it was worth the extra cost."

Peter and Megan live in the Sydney suburb of Granville. Although it's been very dry there in recent months, their tank hasn't run dry yet. Lack of space forced them to limit the tank capacity to 3000 L, but their large roof area helps them collect enough water every month for their suburban garden, washing machine and one of the toilets.

"While it's drought I keep the vegies going rather than growing," said Peter. Although they're using rainwater, they're still bound by Sydney's water restrictions because the tank has a top-up connection to the mains water supply.

When choosing a tank and a solar-powered pump, Peter and Megan had to do much of the research themselves, online. "It's a pity there's no good website that provides a one-stop shop for all the information you need about tanks, pumps, plumbing and so on," Peter said.

He eventually found useful information on Sydney Water's website, and a calculator on the Upper Parramatta River Catchment Trust's website that helped him work out the tank capacity they needed (see *For more information*, page 13, for web addresses).

Since their renovations, when they also installed a water-efficient front-loading washing machine, Peter and Megan have been able to more than halve their water consumption from the mains supply.

"I feel bloody good about it," said Peter, who in his working life has been educating people on how to lower their impact on the environment. "Living in an urban environment means I've had to adjust common solutions to limited space, and it helps me live what I preach.

"And it makes me think a lot about it. We've become more water-wise and reduced consumption in all aspects of our water use."

Authorities generally recommend you clean and maintain your tank and collection system (roof, gutters and pipes) regularly. However, a 2001 South Australian study found that rural children drinking rainwater were less likely to suffer from gastroenteritis than their mains water-drinking counterparts, even though the rainwater tanks had been poorly maintained.

Even so, it *is* important to prune any overhanging branches and, every two or three years, check your tank for sludge and, if necessary, empty it and siphon it out or have it cleaned professionally.

A few devices will help you keep your rainwater clean. A first-flush device diverts the first few litres of rainfall away from the tank and is considered a must if you want to drink the water. Metal strainers and gauze mesh on all inlet and overflow openings will keep leaves, vermin and insects out of the tank. And gutter guards or covered gutters will prevent much solid debris from entering the collection system in the first place.

So, if you want to drink the rainwater you collect, check with your health department, which should also be able to advise on treatment processes if the water quality is in doubt. And talk to your dentist about other sources of fluoride, which you won't get in rainwater.

TANK FACTS

Rainwater tanks come in a multitude of sizes, shapes, materials and colours. You can install one next to the house, on top or under it, on a stand, on the ground or below it. Installing a tank below ground is generally more expensive because of excavation costs, but the tank's out of sight.

- **Cover:** All tanks should have a tight-fitting cover so animals and children can't get access, water won't be lost through evaporation and light doesn't enter, which could promote the growth of algae.
- **Size:** The tank capacity you need depends on what you want to use it for, the size of your household and garden, your roof area and the annual rainfall in your region. Your water authority may be able to help you work out the size you need.

Sydney Water recommends a minimum tank size of 5000 L in an urban environment, if you want to use the water for toilet-flushing, the washing machine and in the garden (but not for drinking water), or a 2000 L one if you only have a small garden or connect to the toilet only. Brisbane City Council estimates that a 3000 L tank connected to the hot water system, toilet and for outdoor use can result in 30–40% savings of mains water.

Type: You can choose from round, rectangular (modular) and slimline tanks. Round ones come either upright or squat, which may fit well under decking or the like. Slimline tanks are generally a bit smaller, but are popular with people who have limited space for a tank. There are also newer alternatives to the traditional shape — a few of these are noted below right.

Material: Metal tanks are made from corrugated or flat rolled metal and can be galvanised or coated. They often come with a plastic inner lining (Aquaplate) that'll increase the life of the tank and protect the water quality.

Polyethylene (poly) tanks are durable and because rust isn't an issue, tend to be recommended for people living near the ocean. Concrete tanks can be bought ready-made or custom-made on-site. Fibreglass tanks tend to be more expensive: they're rust and chemical-resistant and designed to withstand extreme temperatures. They're more suitable for above-ground installation, while all other types can also be installed below ground.

Location: To reduce water loss through evaporation from inspection holes, don't put it where it'll be in the path of the hot midday sun.

COSTS AND EXTRAS

Tanks can cost as little as a few hundred dollars for a basic, small, freestanding model without pump and extras, to many thousands of dollars for a large, custom-built model with all the bells and whistles. The costs vary depending on the size, material, finish and strength of the tank.

When we checked out prices from a few manufacturers for polyethylene and galvanised metal tanks, they ranged from around $550 to $750 for a 2000 L model, from $800 to $900 for a 4000–5000 L one and from $1250 to $1695 for a 9000 L tank. It's worth shopping around.

Further to these costs are any charges for delivery and installation; extra materials (such as pipes, fittings and taps); optional extras (such as a first-flush or backflow-prevention device); a pump (unless you can use gravity for water pressure); and a stand (unless you want to put it on the ground or below it, in which case you may need to factor in costs for special preparation or excavation).

Last of all there are labour costs for a licensed plumber, if you want to connect the tank to your mains water supply, and costs for any additional work that needs to be done to your roof and/or guttering.

And after all these expenses, you're ready to reap the benefits ... as long as it rains.

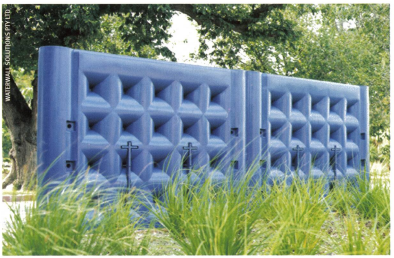
TANKS CANADA

NO SPACE FOR A TANK?

We've come across a couple of clever alternatives (which we stress we haven't tested or even touched) if you have no space at all for a standard tank or don't like the look of one, and it'd be worth checking your local area for others if you're in that position.

The **RAIN REVIVA** underfloor storm- or greywater management system consists of sacs (much like sealed, flexible bladders) that you can fit into small or irregular spaces, such as under the house. It's largely DIY (unless you want to connect it to your water supply) and costs $2090 with a 2200 or 3800 L sac, pump and fittings; larger and irregularly shaped sacs can be custom-built. For more information, go to www.rainreviva.com.au or phone (03) 9735 2822 or 1300 552 695.

The **WATERWALL** modular rainwater storage system consists of slim, connectable polyethylene tanks that'll fit into narrow spaces such as under eaves, or can be installed freestanding as fence or garden dividers (see below). The system is available from Bunnings Warehouse in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide metropolitan areas. Each module holds 1200 L and costs $999 including a wall fixing bracket (a freestanding frame costs $195 and a joiner kit $29.95). For more information, go to www.waterwall.com.au or phone (03) 9689 3055.


WATERWALL SOLUTIONS PTY LTD

Reusing greywater

Installing a rainwater tank is a great start, but what if it doesn't rain for a long time? Should we also reuse our bath, shower and washing water on the garden? Or do the potential health risks outweigh the benefits of reusing this water?

Wastewater from the kitchen, bathroom and laundry (but not the toilet, bidet or urinal) is called greywater. It usually contains soap, detergent and fat.

- The bath, shower and handbasin produce the best greywater for garden irrigation.
- In the laundry, it's better to reuse the rinse water from the washing machine than the wash water, as it contains less salt, phosphates and bacteria.
- Untreated kitchen greywater can pose problems because of the fat and food particles it usually contains, or a high level of alkalis from dishwasher detergent. Greywater from these sources should only be used on plants once it's been treated.

Highly regulated

Because of its potential to harm human health and the environment, the use of domestic greywater is highly regulated by local and state governments. So before you decide to reuse your greywater, you must check with the authorities that regulate wastewater use in your area whether it's permitted:

- Your local council may be able to advise whether the area you live in can support greywater use from an environmental perspective.
- If it doesn't know, check with other relevant authorities in your state that might, such as an environment, water, groundwater or river catchment agency.
- Then check with your health regulator, which may prohibit the reuse of untreated greywater or provide guidelines that must be observed.
- And you must tell your water supplier or wastewater authority if you change your plumbing.

Greywater systems

If you're allowed to reuse your greywater, you can either divert it directly, untreated, into the garden or treat it with a domestic greywater treatment system first.

- The most basic direct-diversion system just has a valve, switch or tap fitted to the outlet of the appliance's waste pipe (above the S-bend) that you switch when you want to divert the water.
- Alternatively a pump system usually includes a surge tank to hold the water temporarily before it's gradually released into the garden. Direct-diversion systems are used with a perforated drainage pipe for irrigation under the soil surface.
- With a greywater treatment system you can collect, store and treat greywater to a high standard. It may include wetlands, sand, soil or rock filters where the solids are settled and lighter materials floated; septic tanks for anaerobic digestion; aeration, clarification and natural or chemical disinfection. Which treatment method you install depends on what you want to use the treated water for.

Greywater diversion systems may be advertised from a few hundred dollars, but with installation costs on top you're more likely to be around $1000 out of pocket. Treatment systems are generally more expensive, costing upwards of several thousand dollars, depending on size and complexity. Check with your regulators whether rebates are offered, and how you can make sure the system is approved.

Safeguarding public health...

If you decide to divert your greywater untreated, you must observe a few important rules.

- Never store it for more than 24 hours — harmful micro-organisms will thrive in stored greywater.
- Never use it on top of the soil, only underneath with a subsoil irrigation system. This is to rule out the risk of people or animals coming into contact with it, plus the micro-organisms in greywater tend to survive better on topsoil.
- Never let it run off and form puddles, or run into stormwater drains, waterways or other properties — so don't use it when it rains, and have the overflow connected to the sewer.
- Think twice about using greywater to water vegetables. Some experts advise not using it at all on vegies, others only on those you thoroughly cook.

YOUR ROOF

- *Roofs made of galvanised iron, Colorbond, Zincalume, slate and clay/ceramic or concrete tiles are OK for collection of drinking water.*
- *Lead-based paint (if your roof was painted before 1970) and tar-based (bitumen) coatings should be avoided. If your roof was painted with acrylic paint avoid the first few runoffs, which can contain dissolved detergents and other chemicals.*
- *While asbestos fibres are dangerous when inhaled, it's believed asbestos roofing sheets pose no risks for water collection, as long as the material is left undisturbed.*

One way to have nice flowers even with water restrictions is to reuse greywater. You can use it untreated with a lot of restrictions, or you can install a treatment system — the one below uses a carbon filter and ultraviolet lamp, but there are many other ways (see left).

CHARLES RAWLS

... and the environment

Your garden can benefit from the nutrients in greywater, but it can also harm sensitive plants, raise the groundwater table or detrimentally alter the soil, especially if you live in an area that's already affected by salinity or has highly permeable sandy soil. To reduce the potential risks to the environment when using untreated greywater:

- Use washing detergents that are low in or contain no salts and phosphorus, especially if you want to use the washing water. Liquid washing detergents (or powders with potassium salts) generally contain less salt.
- Avoid bleaches, disinfectants and products that contain boron.
- Use less fertiliser, and water regularly with fresh water as well, so salts don't build up.
- Have your soil pH levels checked every few months.

BUILDING A NEW HOME?

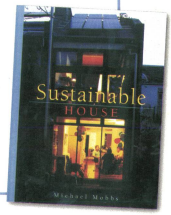
Installing a rainwater tank out of the way under the house, at gutter level, or even one that's completely invisible inside your walls is easier when you're building a new home (or when doing major renovations) than when retrofitting a system.

This applies even more to a greywater system, which requires, as a minimum, connections to your bathroom and/or laundry plumbing and, depending on its complexity, some space outside.

So it makes sense to consider such environmental features when you're starting from scratch. In some areas you may even have to incorporate energy and water-efficient features in your building plans to comply with new legislative requirements.

For more information

- The information some water suppliers, councils and state departments provide on their websites about using rainwater and greywater is a good start for your research. For example:
www.actewagl.com.au
www.sydneywater.com.au
www.uprct.nsw.gov.au
www.brisbane.qld.gov.au
www.sawater.com.au
www.dhhs.tas.gov.au
www.melbournewater.com.au
www.watercorporation.com.au (WA)
www.savewater.com.au (Vic).
- The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing's *Guidance on use of rainwater tanks* contains comprehensive advice on all relevant issues concerning rainwater and your health, and a long list of potential problems, relevant preventive measures and corrective actions. You can download it at www.health.gov.au (type 'rainwater tanks' in the search box). Check also on state health departments' websites.
- To find a supplier, check in your local *Yellow Pages* under 'tank and tank equipment', or browse the net.
- Michael Mobbs gives heaps of advice on installing a rainwater tank and recycling waste water in his book *Sustainable House*. It's available from CHOICE Books — see page 34 to order it.



Food for thought

Colourful descriptions on labels can influence what you buy — but do you really know what those words mean?

IN A NUTSHELL

Descriptive words *on food labels like 'pure', 'natural', 'fresh' and 'real', which imply certain positive qualities, mean different things to different people. And because their meaning isn't defined in our food standards, manufacturers can in fact use them as loosely as they like.*

So don't let this kind *of food labelling influence your choice of brand — until they're properly defined and regulated, words like these are effectively meaningless. Just ignore them when you're shopping.*

It's often not enough for food marketers to call a spade a spade. Plain old rice, pasta, eggs and ice cream become 'pure' rice, 'premium' pasta, 'natural living' eggs and 'real' ice cream, to capture our attention. Put that way, they sound much more appealing. But are they really any different? Probably not.

NO DEFINITIONS

The reason words like these are so influential is that they create a variety of positive expectations about the food products they describe — but there's no guarantee they'll deliver. There's no legal definition for the use on food labels of words like 'pure', 'fresh' and 'natural' — words often referred to as quality descriptors.

So a quality descriptor on a label doesn't necessarily mean the product's any different from or better than a similar product next to it on the supermarket shelf. For example, coconut cream and honey may vary little, if at all, from the 'premium-quality' coconut cream and 'pure' honey sitting nearby.

In 2002 our national food regulator FSANZ produced a user guide to 'Representations about food', which covers five quality descriptors: 'fresh', 'pure', 'natural', 'home-made' and 'real'. However, it isn't legally binding, and it's far less prescriptive than the equivalent guidelines developed by the UK's Food Standards Agency, for example.

Manufacturers have to comply with the Trade Practices Act, but the provisions in the act relating to false representations and misleading or deceptive conduct are broad, and there are no standards regulating specific representations about food, such as quality descriptors.

On top of this, as our survey (see below) shows, people interpret the words differently, so some may not be getting what they expect from a product. Would you regard mango nectar that has been made shelf-stable as 'nature-fresh'? Or what about 'premium' frankfurts — would you expect there to be a non-premium version of the same brand for comparison, or simply that the ingredients are top-quality?

Sometimes these descriptive words seem downright misleading: 'fresh' muffins may have been frozen then thawed before sale; cookies purporting to taste 'home-made' may be mass-produced in a large manufacturing plant. Of course the muffins may have been frozen while still fresh, and the cookies manufactured according to a 'home recipe', but using the words this way can be at odds with what you might think they mean.

CHOICE HOME TESTER

CHOICE'S SURVEY

In July, 157 CHOICE Home Testers took part in an online survey and completed a questionnaire about food

labelling. They were asked what they expect of food products that are described as 'fresh', 'pure', 'natural', 'home-made', 'real' and 'premium'.

They were also asked whether each of these words influences their choice of brand and which, if any, they believe should be subject to guidelines on food labelling. These were the main results:

- Quality descriptors mean a variety of different things to different people. There are varying interpretations of each of these words.
- Most survey participants say their decision to buy one brand of food in preference to another is influenced, at least to a degree, by whether or not quality descriptors appear on the label. Of the words looked at in our survey, 'fresh', 'pure' and 'natural' in particular can have a lot of influence on brand choice.
- The majority of people in the survey think the six quality descriptors we asked about — plus a number of others — should be subject to food labelling guidelines. The level of support for food labelling guidelines was particularly high for those three words most often considered to exert a lot of influence in brand choice.

'Fresh'

The word 'fresh' has more influence on the brand choice of our survey respondents than any of the other quality descriptors in the survey — only 6% said this word on a label doesn't influence their buying decision.

A 'fresh' food mainly creates expectations that little time has elapsed between when it was harvested or caught and its preparation, packing or delivery (59%). 'Fresh' also implies to 34% of our survey participants that the food is unprocessed (or processed only slightly), and to 20% that it hasn't been preserved (or contains minimal preservatives).

Interestingly, 25% of our survey respondents expect a 'fresh' food never to have been frozen, although 'fresh frozen' foods are widely available, and have been for some time.

Here's what some respondents said:

- *"NOT frozen, canned or dried. Recently picked, caught or prepared."*
- *"Recently made or harvested; also a short shelf-life or storage period."*
- *"Not preserved or spoiled."*
- *"Not processed, not containing preservatives."*
- *"Not processed or manufactured. Short shelf-life. All natural."*
- *"Just picked, vitamins and minerals still present and active, full of flavour, good aroma, no preservatives or additives."*

It's not always obvious from the way 'fresh' is used on labels whether it's describing the nature of the product, is indicating a lack of processing or the product's age or recent preparation, or implying taste qualities. 'Fresh' is also used on labels or in advertising to create an emotive effect — 'garden fresh', 'ocean fresh', 'oven fresh', for example — and in subjective expressions like 'fresh taste' and 'seal of freshness'. Even when the context is clear, different people may still have different expectations of the product.

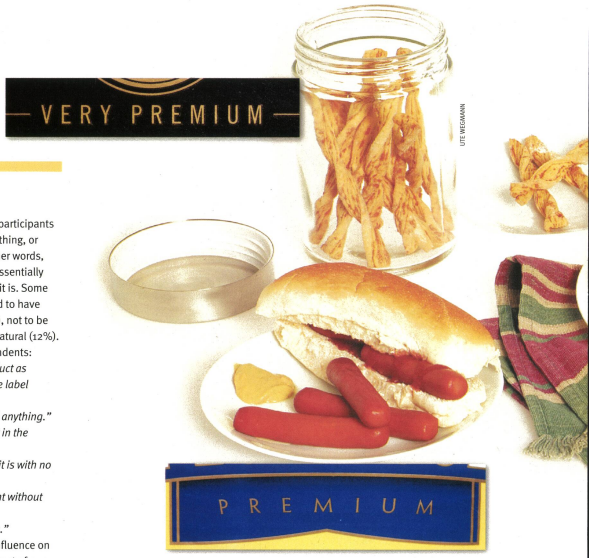
- Other food descriptors that our respondents suggested should be governed by labelling guidelines include 'original', 'improved', 'free from', 'wholesome', 'nutritious' and 'good for you'.

OUR VERDICT

Because quality descriptors influence brand choice but can be interpreted differently by people, they should be clearly defined within the Food Standards Code.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is planning to produce trade practice guidelines for food manufacturers for the use of quality descriptors on food labels. We've passed on our survey findings to the ACCC to aid this process.

Until such guidelines or standards exist, we recommend that you ignore these types of words when doing your supermarket shopping.



LITE WEGMANN

'Pure'

Forty six per cent of our survey participants expect a 'pure' food to have nothing, or at least little, added to it. In other words, the product is expected to be essentially 100% whatever the name says it is. Some respondents expect a pure food to have fewer or no preservatives (13%), not to be 'adulterated' (12%) and to be natural (12%).

In the words of some respondents:

- *"Pure indicates that the product as described is 100% whatever the label describes it as."*
- *"Just that ... PURE. Not added anything."*
- *"There is only one ingredient in the product."*
- *"That it is 100% what it says it is with no additives whatsoever."*
- *"100% of the listed ingredient without additives."*
- *"Unadulterated, no additives."*

'Pure' on a label has a big influence on brand choice. Eighty eight per cent of our survey participants say they'd be influenced to buy a product labelled 'pure' over another brand of the same product without this word on the label.

LITE WEGMANN

'Real'

There was a degree of scepticism about the use of 'real' on a food label, which may explain why it was regarded by our survey respondents as less influential on brand choice:

- *"The opposite is 'pretend' so this word describes the bleeding obvious (excuse the French!)."*
- *"This one I tend not to concern myself with when shopping — I assume that the food that isn't labelled 'real' is actually still real!"*
- *"I would assume the manufacturer has something to hide!"*
- *"If they have to point out the contents are real I don't feel they have much confidence in the product."*

However, with 'real' on the label, some of our respondents would expect the product to contain ingredients that are raw, original or whole (28%). Twenty two per cent said a 'real' food isn't artificial, synthetic or chemical, and 18% that it doesn't have colourings or flavourings. And 'real' to 16% means that the product contains just the ingredients that are claimed for the product.

Some respondents also said that 'real' on the label would mean to them that the product doesn't contain substitutes, imitations or replacements, and isn't reconstituted, rehydrated or reformed.

Despite some scepticism, 'real' on labels still influences brand choice to an extent — 35% of respondents said it had a lot of influence, 33% a little — so it's important that its meaning is clear.

'Premium'

Our survey participants expect big things from a product claiming to be 'premium'. Fifty per cent said that to them it implies high quality, 25% said they'd expect superiority over other similar products and 25% said it means better ingredients.

Interestingly, though, there was less call by survey participants to subject the use of the word 'premium' to labelling guidelines. It seems to have less influence on the buying decision of our survey respondents than some other quality descriptors. However, with 33% of participants' stated brand choice being influenced a lot and 52% a little by the term, it can't be discounted as an effective marketing tool and its meaning and use should be defined.

Here's what some of them said:

- *"Best quality; something that was good enough for me to want to pay more for it."*
- *"It's the top quality, but only if there are others in the range that it can be compared with. 'Premium' on its own means nothing."*
- *"Premium makes me think 'more expensive' because I assume that a premium product would use higher-quality ingredients."*
- *"Top quality ... the best ingredients ... meat with no fat, fruit with no peel added, and stating why it's premium compared to generic brands."*

'Natural'

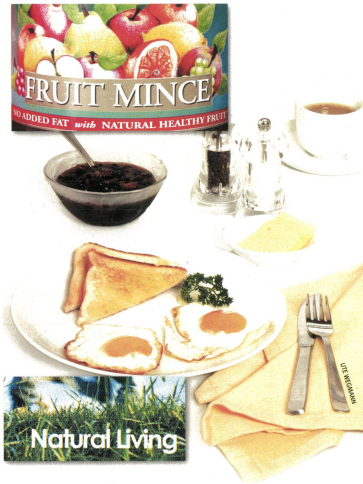
The description 'natural' carries a lot of weight with some people: 86% altogether of our survey participants said it influences brand choice, while 48% said it influenced them a lot. It creates expectations of a food product with few or no chemical additives (45%), artificial preservatives (31%) or artificial colours and flavours (29%). And a quarter of respondents said they'd expect a natural food product to be unprocessed, or at least less processed or manufactured.

Here are some examples:

- *"Just as nature intended, no additives or other human manipulation."*
- *"That the product is not genetically modified, that it is wholesome."*
- *"Not produced by an artificial process, contains no artificial additives, produced naturally."*
- *"Absolutely no additives or preservatives, and absolutely no substitutes such as food colouring."*
- *"I assume natural products are a healthier choice."*

Some food additives (such as flavours and colours) are derived in a lab or manufacturing plant from natural sources, and so technically can be referred to as natural ingredients. And then there are nature-identical flavourings, which are man-made but chemically identical to natural flavouring substances and can be labelled as 'not artificial'. However, consumers probably don't make this distinction between natural and man-made additives — they're still additives. As one respondent wrote: "I know that natural has a pretty broad meaning when it comes to additives such as flavourings, so am quite sceptical when I see this word."

And sometimes the use of the word 'natural' on food labels is simply left open to interpretation. UK food labelling guidelines say claims such as 'natural goodness', 'naturally better' or 'nature's way' are largely meaningless and shouldn't be used. CHOICE would like to see our guidelines follow suit.



'Home-made'

Unsurprisingly, to 34% of our survey participants a food described as 'home-made' is one that's not mass-produced or made in a factory. To a further 16%, home-made is about human-scale production: food made by hand with a caring touch — like something that Mum or Grandma would make.

Some quotes:

- *"A product made by a small cottage industry, using more 'hands-on' procedures."*
- *"Made in relatively small batches using ingredients that you could buy yourself off the shelf."*
- *"Not made by a machine production line, a little more care went into the making."*
- *"Made to a recipe like my Mum used to make."*
- *"Simple ingredients, as I would use at home."*
- *"Unless I bought it at a stall at a market, I wouldn't expect anything special. Anything sold commercially can't be 'home-made' and I see this as a gimmick."*

Respondents to our survey also associated this term with no or at least fewer additives (17%), good ('fresh', 'wholesome', 'raw', 'real', for example) ingredients (16%), fewer or no preservatives (15%) and a unique flavour that's tastier, stronger, better or unique (15%):

- *"No additives, preservatives, colourings, flavourings, etc. Just ingredients that one might find at home."*
- *"That it is more wholesome, less processed with fewer additives (if any)."*
- *"Old-fashioned. Full-flavoured."*
- *"Non-commercial, delicious, unique, flavourful."*

While you may not expect a packaged food on the supermarket shelf to be home-made in the literal sense, our survey shows there are other expectations from a product bearing this term on the label. So even where its use is qualified — 'home-made taste' or 'home-style', for example — it's important people know what they're really getting.

Similar to 'home-made' are the terms 'farmhouse' and 'country', often used to describe food or food ingredients. UK food labelling guidelines state that simply describing an ingredient as 'farmhouse', ('x with farmhouse vegetables', for example), is meaningless, and that the same can be said for the expression 'country-style'. They advise against the use of these terms on food labels. CHOICE would like our guidelines to define the use of these quality descriptors too.

'TRADITIONAL'

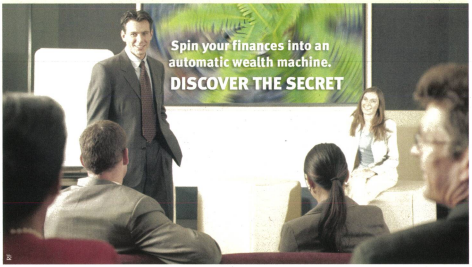
Carrot cake in a packet — with listed ingredients that include colour and vegetable gum (but only 3.2% carrot) — and canned spaghetti and meatballs. Would you describe these products as 'traditional'?

LITE WEGMANN

Is this the end of ye olde investment seminars?

In a recent action under the Australian Financial Services Licensing regime, an undertaking was given that the American John Burley's *Winning the money game* and *Automatic wealth* seminars (promoted by Pow Wow Events) won't provide financial product advice about the stockmarket or any other financial products, and won't promote that they will be providing such advice.

The events still went ahead (but without the advice, according to a press release), but we have to ask, is this the beginning of the end of rip-off investment seminars? We hope so.



WANT MORE MONEY INFO?

CHOICE *Money & Rights* magazine is published six times a year and contains more information on money topics (and your consumer rights) than we could ever fit into CHOICE. To subscribe call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.

'Soft-dollar' steps not big enough

'Soft-dollar' commissions are non-monetary payments given by fund managers and other financial product providers to financial planners, on top of their standard commission for selling a financial product to a client. They include things such as free travel and office or computer equipment to complex profit-sharing arrangements and loans.

In effect they're bribes, designed to build business for the fund manager by providing lucrative incentives for financial planners to recommend particular products.

If you're looking for financial advice you reasonably expect your needs and circumstances to be the driving force in the recommendations and strategies your financial planner provides — after all, you're paying for it both upfront and in future 'trail' commissions attached to the investments. The new Financial Services Reform Act recognises this and requires all factors capable of influencing advice to be disclosed to consumers — and these clearly include soft-dollar payments.

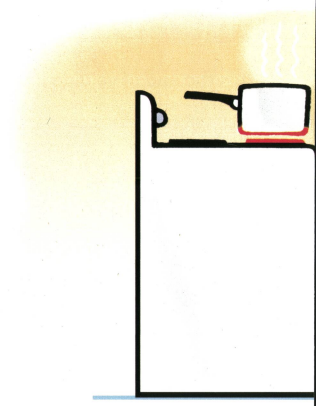
In August the Financial Planning Association (FPA) and Investment and Financial Services Association (IFSA) launched a joint code of conduct to self-regulate soft-dollar commissions. It introduces a ban on certain types of soft-dollar remuneration, including payments of more than $300 and sales volume-related bonuses like luxury cruises. However, it leaves out regulation of other categories of soft-dollar payments, including some that can potentially be worth much more.

These often have a more complex nature that makes them more difficult to inform consumers about in such a way that they'll understand the extent of influence they can exert. One example is 'buyer of last resort', which is essentially an arrangement where a fund manager guarantees it will buy the financial planning practice when the planner decides to sell if there's no other buyer willing to pay the asking price — a price that will increase in line with business generated by the planner for that fund manager.

So while the FPA's and IFSA's new code is welcome in that it begins to tackle the problems consumers face in dealings with the financial planning industry, it still leaves open some forms of soft-dollar arrangements that are capable of exerting influence on the independence and integrity of financial advice.

Watch out for TIPPING STOVES

We take precautions to prevent burns to children from stovetop saucepans, but what if the stove itself is the danger?



IN A NUTSHELL

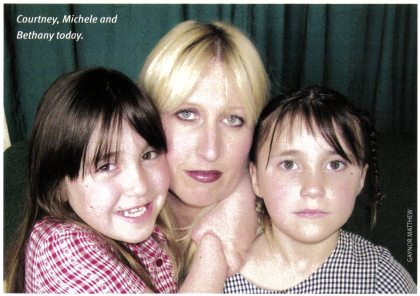
- **Some upright stoves** *are unstable and if not fixed properly can topple onto children.*
- **If your upright stove** *has brackets to stabilise it, check that they're secure.*

Burns and scalds are a common injury to children under five and around 1200 a year end up in hospital emergency departments, the single largest group of burns victims. But while parents are alert to the dangers of hot baths, unguarded pots left on the front of stoves, kettles tugged down by their cord or hot cups of coffee pulled from the table, there's another hazard you'd probably never have thought of — tipping stoves.

A READER'S STORY

Michele Pope's horrifying experience began when she was living in a Department of Housing home in Albury, NSW, with her six young children.

In 1999 her electric upright stove was replaced with a new one — a **SIMPSON Celebrity**. Three months later, while sterilising some bottles on the back elements of the stove for her four-month-old, Jeremy, Michele nipped to the back of the house to get the vacuum cleaner.



Courtney, Michele and Bethany today.

GARY MATHEWS

Alerted by screams, she rushed back to the kitchen to find her two youngest daughters — Courtney, then two and half, and Bethany, one and a half — had come into the kitchen, and somehow the stove had tipped on top of them. Both were badly scalded by the hot water from the saucepan that had tipped onto them. Michele rushed both under a cold shower and then the girls were taken to Albury Base Hospital.

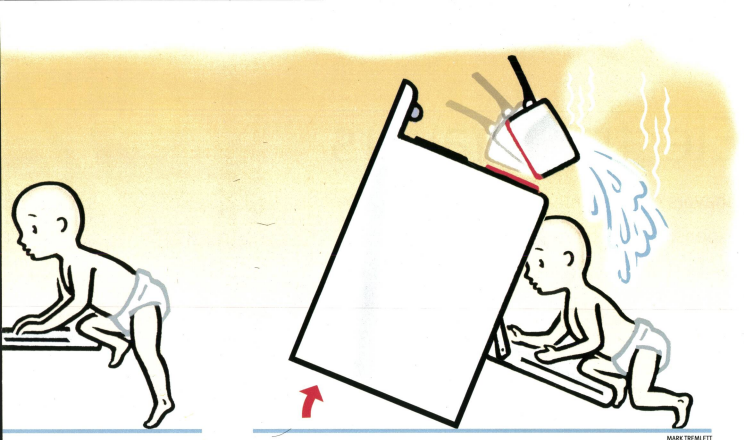
Later that day Courtney, suffering scalds to a quarter of her body, was flown to Melbourne for specialist treatment. She remained there two weeks, returning to hospital later for a series of skin grafts. Unsurprisingly, both girls and their mother have felt the after-effects of the shock and trauma for years.

BAD DESIGN

Determined to prevent this happening to anyone else, Michele took court action. "It was the fear in Courtney's eyes that motivated me," she says. "I never wanted another child to go through that. Her whole body was shaking like a fish out of water, and her skin was just flying off." In 2003 she won an action against **SIMPSON**, the manufacturer of the stove.

In the judgment it was found that while the stove had been properly installed, its design meant it was easily disengaged from the back bracket intended to brace it, after which it could be tipped using pressure applied by just one finger.

Upright stoves can be top-heavy or otherwise unstable, and rely on brackets to stabilise them.



MARK TREMLETT

The court found that while **SIMPSON** had provided instructions for the stove to be stabilised with brackets, it was easy to unintentionally move it off these brackets, rendering it unstable. In the judgment **SIMPSON** was found to have contravened the Trade Practices Act because the defect was inherent in the stove as designed and manufactured, and was ordered to pay compensation.

ELECTROLUX (the current manufacturer of **SIMPSON** products) told CHOICE it stopped making the model of stove named in the case in 2000. While it hasn't recalled existing stoves, it says a new bracket and locking device can be fitted to prevent the stove being pulled away from the wall unless it's unlocked. The company says it also recently put an additional warning on the oven door of 540 mm wide stoves (like Michele's) and that it "strongly advises all users of 540 mm stoves to familiarise themselves with the installation method described in the instruction book".

The NSW Department of Housing says that now as part of its regular assessment of properties the stove's installation is checked.

NOT AN ISOLATED INCIDENT

CHOICE's investigations have revealed Michele's story isn't an isolated incident. In Victoria alone between 1996 and 2003 there were three other cases of stoves tipping onto children. In the US the problem is better known and studies show that most commonly children use the open oven door as a step, tipping the stove over. The results include fatalities and children needing months, sometimes years, of burns rehabilitation.

Time and again these top-heavy stoves hadn't been correctly installed with brackets or hadn't been installed with brackets at all. In New Zealand from mid 1999, Housing New Zealand installed anti-tipping devices in over 7000 homes after a child was scalded in a similar incident.

In Australia, since 2002 the relevant standard has been tightened so that freestanding cooking ranges and ovens must now be able to withstand a load on the door of 22.5 kg without any stabilisation, and a load of 50 kg with stabilisation.

FIXING THE PROBLEM

CHOICE thinks it's disappointing there wasn't a product recall of the **SIMPSON Celebrity** so that all could be fitted with the new brackets.

We contacted the NSW Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to see if it would consider further action. After reading the court's decision, it referred the matter to its Electrical Equipment Appliance Safety Committee to consider whether the stove is hazardous and should be recalled. The committee will also consider the adequacy of the current standard. However, the OFT told us that since the standard was tightened the number of stove tipover incidents has reduced.

If you have an upright stove, particularly if there are toddlers or elderly or infirm people in the house or you ever use the stove to steady yourself, make it a priority to have it checked to see if it's adequately anchored. If you think it isn't correctly installed, contact an installer or the manufacturer, or your landlord if you're renting. ■

Electric shavers

Shavers can be pretty expensive: which ones give the best shave, and are they any better than a razor?

IN A NUTSHELL

- **On test: 10 models of electric shaver:** *six foil and four rotary shavers. Each was tried out by at least seven men, who used them on one- and two-day growth. They also trialled and rated trimmer attachments.*
- **The two most expensive shavers tested** *were rated among the best, but a couple of cheaper foil shavers were judged to be as good.*

CHOICE's volunteers tried out expensive and cheaper models from all the brands on the market to find a convenient, close shave among both rotary and foil electric shavers. The most expensive models ($350–$400) in each category were highly rated, and in fact if you like a rotary shaver it seems you could be disappointed with all but the priciest model we tested.

On the other hand, a high price doesn't guarantee you'll like a shaver: some only slightly less expensive models rated just OK overall, while some of the cheaper foil models scored quite well (see *What to buy*, right). Assuming that not all rotary shaver devotees will want to spend over $300 on our trialists' favourite, we've also profiled a couple of less expensive ones which weren't rated as highly, but might still be worth considering.

What to buy

Prices are those supplied by manufacturers in August/September 2004, rounded to the nearest dollar.

ROTARY SHAVERS

PHILISHAVE 8000 SERIES AQUAGENIC SENSOTEC HQ8865

Price: $369

- Good shave on one-day growth; about half the trialists thought it was also good on two-day growth.
- Normal and sensitive skin settings.
- Easy to clean: can be washed under a tap.
- Very comfortable to hold, very quiet, no noticeable vibrations.
- Mixed reaction to the pop-up trimmer: half thought it fairly effective, the other half fairly ineffective.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

- *"By far the best shaver of the group. The only one with a truly satisfactory performance."*
- *"Too slow. Have to go over the same area too many times, especially the neck area."*

WORTH CONSIDERING

While the following models didn't rate as highly as shaver category, we've included them because the

PHILISHAVE 5000 SERIES MICRO+ EASYSHAVE HQ5812

Price: $120

- Most thought it was good on one-day growth; not as good on two-day growth, with some whisker pulling.
- Most thought cleaning (with the brush supplied) was fairly easy; a couple thought it was a little fiddly.
- Comfortable to hold, moderately quiet, no noticeable vibrations.
- Most thought the pop-up trimmer was fairly effective.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

- *"Fairly basic performance — seems like an average shaver that does the job without being exceptional."*
- *"Not particularly effective on longer whiskers."*

LISHAVE 8000 Series (see left) in the rotary
ostantially cheaper and so may be worth a try.

REMINGTON TITANIUM MICROFLEX R950

Price: $104

- About half thought it was good on one- and two-day growth; some whisker pulling on two-day growth.
- Cleaning the shaver (with the brush supplied) was fairly easy.
- Comfortable to hold, it was considered moderately or very quiet, with only mild or unnoticeable vibrations.
- Mixed reaction to the pop-up trimmer, ranging from very effective to fairly ineffective.
- Takes 16 hours to charge, and no quick-charge feature.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

- *"Too slow, tedious — have to go over the same part of face many times. Irritating."*
- *"I had to use a conventional blade razor after each shave to get a decent smooth, clean finish."*

FOIL SHAVERS

BRAUN ACTIVATOR 8585

Price: $399

- Good shave on one- and two-day growth; some whisker pulling on two-day growth.
- Easy to clean: the *Clean & Charge* station that you stand the shaver in recognises when cleaning is needed and picks the appropriate cleaning program. (See *One-step cleaning and charging*, page 25, for more.) Cleaning fluid cartridges cost $19.95 for two. It also lubricates the cutting parts and tells you when you need to replace the foil and cutter block. You can't recharge it without the station so you have to carry it with you when travelling.
- Comfortable to hold, moderately quiet, with mild or unnoticeable vibrations.
- The trimmer was considered fairly effective.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

- *"Excellent shave but features are a bit over the top from my point of view. Good for lazy people!"*
- *"The shaver did leave a couple of sparse hairs in a few places but was otherwise fine."*

PANASONIC WASHABLE ES4001

Price: $129

- Good shave on one-day growth; about half the trialists thought it was also good on two-day growth (some reported whisker pulling), and it didn't seem to handle longer hairs or hairs lying close to skin.
- Can be used wet (with shaving lotion) or dry.
- Easy to clean: can be washed under a tap.
- Comfortable to hold, moderately quiet, with mild or unnoticeable vibrations.
- The pop-up trimmer was considered effective.
- Takes eight hours to charge, and no quick-charge feature.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

- *"Did the job well enough, easy to clean, nothing flash."*
- *"It was very good to use except that it didn't pick up all hairs, even after repeated passes."*

SUNBEAM LIFT & WASH SH5600

Price: $150

- Most thought it was good on one-day growth, not so good on two-day growth.
- There was some whisker pulling and some trialists experienced nicks and grazes.
- Can be used wet (with shaving lotion) or dry.
- Easy to clean: can be washed under a tap.
- Comfortable to hold and moderately quiet.
- Mixed verdict on vibrations, ranging from 'not noticeable' to 'slightly strong'.
- The pop-up trimmer was considered effective.
- Takes 12 hours to charge, and no quick-charge feature.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

- *"Not bad, not the closest shave, though. You'd still need to use a razor to get difficult hairs."*
- *"Easily as good as a blade."*

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

The rest of both the foil and rotary shavers on trial only rated 'OK' for performance, while the top models rated 'good'. Even if a shaver was rated 'good' for ease of use, this wasn't enough to lift the trialists' overall rating to 'good' if they thought shaving performance wasn't up to it. The models are shown in the above photo.

Similar models

ROTARY SHAVERS

- Similar to the **PHILISHAVE 8000 Series Aquagenic Sensotec HQ8865** trialled: **HQ8894** (has up to 100 minutes' cordless shaving time, three-minute quick charge, minutes-left indication and cleaning-required indicator — $459); **HQ8885** (minutes-left indication and cleaning-required indicator — $399).
- Similar to the **PHILISHAVE 5000 Series Micro+ Easyshave HQ5812** trialled: **HQ5426** (mains operation only — $80).
- Similar to the **REMINGTON Titanium MicroFlex R950** trialled: **R970** (has a 'fuel gauge', which indicates battery charge remaining, and a faster-charging battery — $134).

FOIL SHAVERS

- Similar to the **BRAUN Activator 8585** trialled: **8595** (has an interactive LCD display — $469).
- Similar to the **SUNBEAM Lift & Wash SH5600** trialled: **SH4400** (mains operation only — $100); **SH7700** (has recharge warning, one-hour fast recharge, battery life LED countdown, recharge stand and soft-touch body — $200).
- Similar to the **BRAUN Twin Control 4605** trialled: **4615** (has low-charge LED indicator — $129).
- Similar to the **PANASONIC Linear Drive ES8026** trialled: **ES7017** (runs 3000 strokes per minute slower, doesn't have a linear motor or slide-up trimmer — $219).

	PERFORMANCE			FEATURES				
Brand / model (in rank order)	**1** Overall rating	**2** Performance rating	**3** Ease of use rating	Quick charge (minutes)	Wet and dry shaving	**4** Washable	Low-battery indicator	Mains batter use
ROTARY MODELS								
PHILISHAVE 8000 Series Aquagenic Sensotec HQ8865	Good	Good	Very good	6		✓	✓	✓
PHILISHAVE 5000 Series Micro+ Easyshave HQ5812	OK	OK	OK	6				✓
REMINGTON Titanium MicroFlex R950	OK	OK	Good	na				✓
REMINGTON Titanium Smart System R9500	OK	OK	OK	5		✓	✓	✓
FOIL MODELS								
BRAUN Activator 8585	Good	Good	Good	3		**(A)**	✓	✓
PANASONIC Washable ES4001	Good	Good	Good	na	✓	✓		
SUNBEAM Lift & Wash SH5600	Good	Good	Good	na	✓	✓		
BRAUN Twin Control 4605	OK	OK	Good	na		✓		✓
PANASONIC Linear Drive ES8026	OK	OK	OK	5	✓	✓	✓	
REMINGTON MicroScreen 2 TCT RS4843	OK	OK	Good	5			✓	✓

* *Prices were supplied by manufacturers in August/September 2004; they're rounded to the nearest dollar.*
na *Not available.*
ns *Not stated.*
(A) *Only with supplied Clean & Charge station.*

One-step cleaning and charging

Two models — the **REMINGTON Titanium Smart System R9500** and **BRAUN Activator 8585** — come with a cleaning and charging station.

Special alcohol-based cleaning fluid is used: the **REMINGTON** fluid comes in a bottle and you pour it into a chamber (which our trialists found a little fiddly to set up); the **BRAUN** has cartridges which you simply slot into place. You can't transport the stations once they're set up and (because the fluid is flammable) they need to be used in a well-ventilated area out of children's reach. The **REMINGTON** fluid costs $9.95 a bottle and lasts about four weeks; the **BRAUN** cartridges cost $19.95 for two and last three months each.

If you're travelling you can charge the **REMINGTON** by plugging it into the mains, so you don't have to carry the station around with you. In between station cleans, you can wash it under a tap or use the supplied brush. You can't charge the **BRAUN** without the station or wash it under a tap (see the profile, page 23, for more).

While trialists found these cleaning/charging stations convenient to use, their bulk (they take up a fair bit of bench space) and the ongoing expense of the cleaning fluid put them off a bit.

Converting from manual?

For all the features — and high price — of most electric shavers, the majority of our trialists normally use a manual razor to shave, and these shavers on trial didn't persuade them to convert. The prevailing sentiment was that the shave with an electric shaver didn't seem to be as close as with their normal razor. In addition, many trialists noted they still needed their razor to get the more difficult hairs.

It could be because they were only using the electric shavers on and off for four weeks: it's recommended that if you're changing from a razor to an electric shaver, you — and your skin — need up to a month of continuous use to get the most out of it. Even changing from one electric shaver to another appears to require a breaking-in period of a couple of weeks. For this reason we didn't focus in shaver profiles on negative comments regarding the shavers' effect on skin.

You may find that the shavers on trial here get better the longer you use them, both in terms of closeness of shave and lack of irritation. Another suggestion is to look for a shaver with a satisfaction guarantee that allows you to return it after 30 days if you're not happy with its performance.

ECIFICATIONS

imed arge time ours)	Claimed shave time after full charge	5 Battery type	Origin	Warranty (years)	Price ($)*
	Up to 45 minutes	NiCad	Holland	2	369
	Up to 30 minutes	NiCad	Holland	2	120
	40 minutes	NiCad	China	2	104
	60 minutes	NiMH	China	2	204
	50 minutes	NiMh	Germany	2	399
	7 shaves, 3 minutes per shave	NiMH	China	1	129
	70 minutes	NiMh	Europe	2	150
	25 minutes	NiCad	Indonesia	2	109
	14 shaves, 3 minutes per shave	NiMH	Japan	1	329
	Up to 40 minutes	ns	China	2	104

1 Overall rating

Tralists gave each shaver an overall rating between 1 and 10, which we averaged and converted to a verbal rating on a scale ranging from 'very poor' to 'excellent'.

2 Performance rating

Trialists considered the following when rating the shaver's performance:

- Pulling of whiskers when shaving one- and two-day growth.
- Grazing or nicking of skin when shaving one- and two-day growth.
- How the face felt and looked after shaving a one- and two-day growth.
- Effectiveness of the trimmer.

3 Ease of use rating

The ease of use rating took into account comfort of holding the shaver, noise, vibrations, ease of cleaning and ease of packing the shaver into its supplied case (all have one).

4 Washable

This makes the shaver easier to clean; it doesn't necessarily mean you can use it for wet shaves. All shavers come supplied with a cleaning brush.

5 Battery type

Compared with NiCad batteries, nickel-metal hydrides (NiMH) are less toxic to the environment, and are claimed to have a greater capacity (so more shaves per charge). Unfortunately they're more expensive, which is why fewer models have them.

Frying tonight?

You can pay a fortune for a designer frypan, but there is such a thing as a good non-stick pan at a reasonable price.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Some big-name brands** *didn't cook as well as less expensive pans — you can save yourself $50 to $100 and still be happy.*
- **Paying top dollar** *doesn't guarantee a more durable non-stick surface either.*

If your ultimate kitchen is packed with designer appliances and your kitchen bookshelf groaning under the weight of celebrity cookbooks, perhaps what you need is a designer frypan.

But whether your idea of the ultimate frypan is one with a European heritage and price tag to match, or simply one sporting a celebrity moniker, don't pay a fortune for one that doesn't measure up.

Our tests of non-stick frypans (around 30 cm in diameter) reveal some surprising results — with some of the big names like **SCANPAN** and **TEFAL Jamie Oliver Professional Series** being outgunned by some models $50 or even $100 cheaper. So while you *can* pay over $150 for a non-stick frypan that really delivers, you don't have to.

The **MEYER** and **SWISS DIAMOND** frypans were the two top overall performers, rating well for cooking, durability and ease of use. The **ILLA Polar** is our Best Buy as it's durable, cooks well and is considerably less expensive than the other top performers. However, our testers judged the handle to be less comfortable than some, so it's worth trying this in the store.

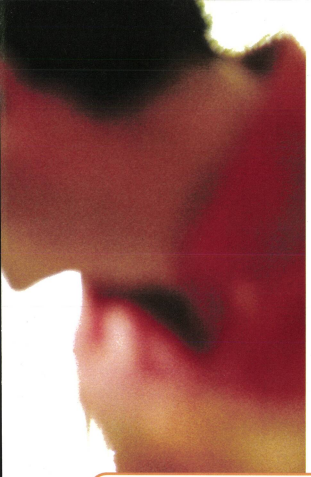
Any of the frypans that scored 73% or above overall (see the table, page 28) are worth considering — even though some were slightly let down by their durability or cooking performance — if you find them at a good price.

HOW NON-STICK IS NON-STICK?

With the best of the pans you can cook a fried egg without any oil and it will slide straight out when you tilt the pan.

Even after our harsh scratch test (see note 3, page 29), the best pans only needed the egg to be given a nudge and out it came. But looking after the surface of your pan is the key to keeping it non-sticky — see *Dos and don'ts*, page 28.

GETTY IMAGES



HOW SAFE ARE NON-STICK COATINGS?

You may be aware of reports suggesting that some non-stick surfaces — for example, Teflon — give off harmful chemicals.

It's true that chemicals such as trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) can be given off by some coatings at extremely high temperatures. But it's unlikely to happen during normal cooking: whatever is in your pan will be burnt and smoking well before the temperature is high enough for the coating to decompose significantly — your whole pan would be ruined. So that makes another reason not to leave pans on a high heat or unattended.

Research hasn't indicated harmful long-term effects of TFA on people. At this stage there's no evidence that non-stick cooking poses a safety risk, though some manufacturers suggest you keep pet birds out of the kitchen area because they have very sensitive respiratory systems and can be affected by many types of household fumes, not just the remote possibility of TFA.

As for the safety of eating any bits of peeling non-stick coating, they simply travel straight through you with no ill effects.

WHAT TO BUY

The two top models and our Best Buy are profiled in rank order. Prices shown are recommended retail, as supplied by manufacturers or distributors in August/September 2004. The table on page 28 has scores and more details on features.

MEYER SELECT 28 cm FRENCH SKILLET

Price: $100

GOOD POINTS

- The best frypan on test: excellent heat distribution for cooking (helped by its thick base), and excellent durability.
- Comfortable handle.
- Dishwasher-safe.
- Fits easily into a domestic sink.
- Excellent results on all cooktop types (gas, radiant ceramic and induction).

BAD POINTS

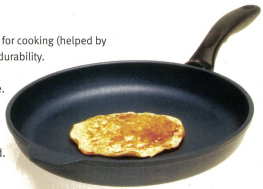
- Relatively expensive.
- Stainless steel exterior can be difficult to keep clean.

SWISS DIAMOND 28 cm

Price: $120

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent heat distribution for cooking (helped by its thick base), and excellent durability.
- Comfortable handle.
- Easy-clean exterior surface.
- Fits easily into a domestic sink.
- Dishwasher-safe.
- Metal utensils can be used.



BAD POINTS

- Relatively expensive.
- Thin grooves on base can be difficult to clean.

ILLA POLAR

Price: $60 BEST BUY

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cooking performance and excellent durability.
- Relatively lightweight.
- Dishwasher-safe.
- Fits easily into a domestic sink.
- The manufacturer says metal utensils can be used.
- Relatively inexpensive.

BAD POINTS

- Slightly uncomfortable handle.
- Exterior surface can be difficult to keep clean.

PROFILES: GEOFF AMBLER

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Cooking score (%)	3 Durability score (%)	4 Ease of use score (%)	5 Induction cooking score (%)	FEATURES Dishwasher-safe	Oven-safe	SPECIF 6 Thickn of base
MEYER Select 28 cm French Skillet 76257C	87	92	90	75	92	✓	✓ (180°C)	5.1
SWISS DIAMOND SD6428 28 cm	85	88	90	75	na	✓	✓ (260°C)	6.7
CIRCULON 2 80213 French Skillet Open	80	77	90	75	na		✓ (180°C)	4.1
ANOLON Advanced 81864AA French Skillet Open	79	78	90	70	na		✓ (190°C)	5.0
CENTURIA Anodised Open	79	83	90	60	na	✓	✓ (200°C)	3.6
MORGANWARE Stellar 7000	79	88	90	50	78			5.5
ILLA Polar ZY1230B	78	82	90	60	na	✓		3.3
ESSTEELE Onyx C18324ON Skillet	77	76	90	65	na		✓ (260°C)	4.1
BACCARAT CUP-030 30 cm	76	93	54	65	83	✓		5.8
SILVERSTONE Cuisine Colours 30 cm Open French Skillet	76	84	66	70	74		✓ (180°C)	5.0
SCANPAN Classic 17028	73	81	72	60	na	✓	✓ (260°C)	5.7
TEFAL Jamie Oliver Professional Series	73	93	54	50	73	✓	✓ (260°C)	6.8
GABRIEL GATÉ Le Pan 11870	67	74	48	70	na	✓	✓ (260°C)	3.2
RACO Gallery 17142	67	73	48	75	na		✓ (180°C)	3.2
TEFAL Evolution	67	72	54	70	na	✓		2.9
RELIANCE 30 cm Non Stick **(A)**	62	74	40	60	na	✓		2.3
BACCARAT IVF-2301 30 cm	61	70	48	55	na	✓		4.0
ARCOSTEEL IVF-7530 30 cm	58	73	32	55	na	✓ **(B)**		4.2
ARCOSTEEL IVF-130 30 cm Volcano	55	59	48	55	na	✓		2.2
CHEF CRAFT 30 cm 55185	52	63	28	55	na	✓		2.0

Buying and using your non-stick frypan: dos and don'ts

When buying:

- Look for a thick, heavy base, which generally distributes heat better.
- Bear in mind that painted exterior surfaces can be more difficult to keep clean.
- Consider the comfort of the handle and weight of the pan — will you be able to lift it easily when it's full of food?
- Consider the size and shape — will it fit in your sink, cupboards or dishwasher?
- For an induction cooktop, you need a pan with a base made of ferrous metal (metal that can be magnetised) that fits perfectly over at least one of your elements.

Before the first use:

- Wash it in warm water with detergent to remove any grease or chemicals used in the manufacturing process.
- Most manufacturers recommend you 'precondition' or 'season' your frypan. Wipe some oil over the surface and wipe off the excess with paper towel. Repeating this process from time to time may help keep the non-stick surface working well.

When cooking with your pan:

- Beware of overheating it. Turning the heat up too high can not only discolour your pan, it can also damage the non-stick surface (particularly if you use a fine film of oil or cooking spray, which isn't recommended by some manufacturers). Only use high heat for boiling or reducing liquids.
- To brown or sear meat, preheat the pan for two to three minutes on medium heat.
- It's best to use wooden or plastic utensils to avoid scratching. However, some brands claim metal can be used.

Cleaning up:

- Don't take your hot pan straight from the stove and put it in cold water — the metal can warp. This formed part of our durability test — see note 3, far right.
- The table gives details of which pans can be put in the dishwasher. However, handwashing is often recommended to extend the life of the pan. If you do use a dishwasher, you'll need to recondition the surface — see left.

TAMARA GRAHAM

eight	8 Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)*
	10	China	Meyer Cookware	100
	'Lifetime'	Switzerland	Bambis Import Co	120
	'Lifetime'	Thailand	Meyer Cookware	130
	'Lifetime'	Thailand	Meyer Cookware	170
	'Lifetime'	China	Morganware	85
	'Lifetime'	China	Morganware	96
	ns	Italy	Illa	60
	'Lifetime'	Thailand	Meyer Cookware	89
	ns	China	Housewares International	65
	'Lifetime'	China	Meyer Cookware	35
	10	Denmark	Sheldon and Hammond	120
	(C)	France	Groupe SEB	169
	'Lifetime'	China	KMart	30
	'Lifetime'	China	Meyer Cookware	70
	'Lifetime'	France	Big W	42
	1	Italy	Coles	12
	10	Italy	Housewares International	50
	10	Italy	Housewares International	30
	3	Italy	Housewares International	30
	ns	Italy	Woolworths	13

* *Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manufacturers in August/September 2004.*

na *Not applicable: can't be used on an induction cooktop.*

ns *Not stated.*

(A) *The contract with the supplier ends in December 2004, when it may be replaced with a new model.*

(B) *However, hand washing is recommended to prolong the life of the frypan and non-stick surface.*

(C) *12 months for defects, 'lifetime' for non-stick surface.*

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of cooking performance (50%), durability (25%) and ease of use (25%).

2 Cooking score

We assessed each frypan for evenness of heat distribution by cooking a pancake in it, and checked its non-stick capacity by first frying an egg with no oil, then frying four eggs one after another using only ¼ teaspoon of oil to start.

The tests were done on an electric ceramic cooktop; heat distribution tests were done for half the pans on a gas cooktop too, and there were no significant differences from the electric cooktop scores, so we didn't continue.

3 Durability score

This score is based on the:

- **Scratch test** (60%). A section of each frypan was scrubbed up to 10,000 times with a Scotch Brite scourer with 5 kg of weight behind it. The eight top models all survived this test without bare metal being exposed, though some had a slightly polished finish by the end. Some pans showed scratch marks, while the worst ended up with bare metal where the scouring took place — some less than halfway through the test. This is a pretty rigorous test, but it gives a good comparison of the durability of the different non-stick surfaces (see the photo, below).
- **Thermal shock test** (40%). The frypans were heated to 300°C and then plunged into cold water. Afterwards we checked them for visible signs of damage and any changes to the flatness of their base.

4 Ease of use score

Three people assessed the pans for comfort of the handle and ease of cleaning. All the pans are relatively easy to clean, although crevices that can trap grease and painted exteriors that are harder to keep clean scored lower.

5 Induction cooktop performance score

Some of the pans (those with a ferrous metal base) can be used on an induction cooktop. We subjected them to the same cooking tests as on the ceramic cooktop (see note 2) and only the **MEYER Select** cooked as well — the others showed worse heat distribution.

6 Thickness of base

The thicker the base, the better the heat distribution in the pancake test. All the frypans with bases thicker than 5 mm gave an excellent result in this test.

7 Weight

The weight of the pans didn't form part of the ease of use assessment, as it's a matter of personal preference.

8 Warranty

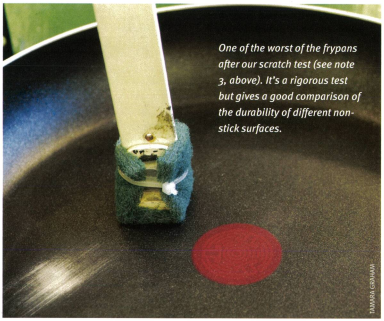
Many of the frypans have a 'lifetime' warranty, which is generally undefined and can best be interpreted as meaning the pan is guaranteed to last as long as it lasts — not very useful. It's more helpful to have a specified number of years.

For people with a disability

We assessed the frypans for their suitability for people with a disability, using guidelines from the Independent Living Centre (NSW). Look for:

- A pan with two handles: the **SWISS DIAMOND** is the only one tested that has two, but the second handle can become very hot, so an oven glove is needed. It's also relatively heavy.
- A handle long enough to use with two hands — comfortable, contoured and reasonably thick.
- Handles should be made of a material that doesn't get hot.
- The pan should be lightweight, easy to clean and have well-angled sides so you can slide food out easily.

The **ILLA Polar** was judged the best of our recommended pans for people with a disability: it's lightweight, durable and cooked well — see the profile, page 27.



One of the worst of the frypans after our scratch test (see note 3, above). It's a rigorous test but gives a good comparison of the durability of different non-stick surfaces.

Folate: the facts

Are you eating enough?

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Folate is a vitamin** *that's essential for healthy growth and development. It's particularly important for the foetus in the first few weeks of pregnancy.*
- **Green leafy vegetables,** *oranges, legumes and nuts, as well as breakfast cereals and bread with added folate, are all good dietary sources.*
- **Women of childbearing age** *are encouraged to consider taking a folate supplement to help prevent neural tube defects in the developing foetus.*

Folate is a water-soluble B vitamin that's found naturally in foods such as green leafy vegetables, oranges, legumes, nuts and liver. Folic acid is the synthetic form used in supplements and to add folate to foods such as breads and breakfast cereals (the terms are generally used interchangeably).

Folate's essential for proper cell replication and growth, helping in the formation of genetic material and the building blocks needed for making protein in cells. Cells like red blood cells and immune cells that require rapid repair have a high need for folate, as does rapidly growing tissue, such as a developing foetus.

We all need some folate in our diet for healthy growth and development. But it's particularly important for women of childbearing age to get enough, to help prevent birth defects known as neural tube defects (NTDs).

WHAT'S THE LINK TO BIRTH DEFECTS?

Folate is essential for the development of the neural tube, which encloses the spinal cord. When the neural tube doesn't close properly, leaving the spinal cord exposed or covered only with skin, babies are either stillborn or suffer from an NTD such as spina bifida, anencephaly or encephalocele.

Babies born with NTDs often die early in life. Those who survive usually have lifelong physical and often intellectual disabilities.

NTDs in the foetus can be detected by ultrasound at around 18 weeks, and affect around 400–500 pregnancies in Australia each year (that's one in 600–700 pregnancies). Anencephaly and spina bifida occur with similar frequency, but babies with anencephaly don't survive beyond the newborn period. Encephalocele is less common.

The neural tube is formed in the first month of pregnancy, probably before you even know you're pregnant, which is why women need plenty of folate even before they become pregnant.

HOW MUCH FOLATE DO I NEED?

The current recommended dietary intake (RDI) is:

- 100 micrograms (μg) a day for children aged 1–7 years.
- 150 μg a day for children aged 8–11.

- 200 μg a day for children 12 and above, and adults.

Pregnant women need at least double that amount.

Women planning to become pregnant are encouraged to boost their intake of folate by taking a folic acid supplement for at least one month before and for the first three months of pregnancy. But because folate is essential for the foetus from the very first weeks of development, experts generally recommend that *all* women of childbearing age should aim for at least 400 μg in their diets each day, in order to help reduce the incidence of NTDs in both planned and unplanned pregnancies.

There's evidence that any increase in folate intake by women of childbearing age is associated with a decreased incidence of NTDs.

WHERE CAN I GET IT?

The best way to get your recommended daily amount is to eat many different foods that are rich in folate. If you eat a diet with plenty of other B vitamins and vitamin C, there's a good chance your diet already includes a lot. Eating foods that contain at least 40 μg a serve (one fifth of the adult RDI) will help you meet your daily target. They include:

- Oranges.
- Broccoli (and, to a lesser extent, cauliflower).
- English spinach/silverbeet.
- Brussels sprouts.
- Baked beans.
- Lentils.
- Peanuts.
- Bread with added folate.
- Breakfast cereal with added folate.

Liver is also a very rich source of folate, but women who are or could be pregnant shouldn't eat it — it contains high levels of vitamin A, which can harm the foetus.

If you're a woman of childbearing age and don't regularly eat plenty of fruit, veg and fortified breads and cereals, it can be quite a struggle to get the recommended 400 μg of folate from food, so taking a daily folic acid supplement can help and is the best way of ensuring maximum protection against NTDs. Where there's a family history of NTDs, women may need to take even more: see your doctor for advice.

Some multivitamin complexes also contain folic acid. But if you're pregnant or planning a pregnancy, it's important to use a product specifically designed for folic acid supplementation during pregnancy. Taking enough folic acid in the form of a multivitamin may result in too much of other substances during pregnancy, such as vitamin A.

CAN I HAVE TOO MUCH?

There haven't been any adverse effects associated with getting too much folate from food. And taking folic acid supplements over many years appears to be safe and isn't addictive. It's one of the vitamins your body gets rid of naturally if you have more than you need.

That said, there's nothing to be gained from taking folic acid supplements above a dosage of 500 μg per day, except in certain conditions (such as if your body doesn't absorb it well or where there's a family history of NTDs), when medical supervision is required.

In fact it's possible that very high doses of folic acid may mask symptoms of pernicious anaemia, the anaemia associated with vitamin B_{12} deficiency — a condition mainly seen in older people — leaving affected people unaware of the underlying problem. If vitamin B_{12} deficiency isn't detected and treated, it can lead to permanent nerve damage.

WHAT ABOUT TOO LITTLE?

Alcohol and certain medications (including some used to treat epilepsy, inflammatory bowel disease and cancer) may interfere with folate and cause folate deficiency, which can result in a blood disorder known as megaloblastic anaemia. Pharmacists should be able to provide a list of those medications; if you're taking any of them and you think you're not getting enough folate in your diet, talk to your doctor before taking folic acid supplements.

OTHER BENEFITS

- Folate — together with vitamins B_{12} and B_6 — helps maintain low blood levels of homocysteine, an amino acid produced by the body. Elevated homocysteine is a risk factor for heart disease and senile dementia.
- There's some evidence to suggest that folate may help prevent the development of several types of cancer, in particular colon cancer.

Getting the most folate from food

Folate is extremely sensitive to light, heat and air, so the way food is stored and cooked is important. Levels deplete when food's stored for lengthy periods, and folate is lost when food's cooked — and in particular boiled — for a long time. So follow these tips to get the most folate from your food:

- Serving fruit and vegetables raw will provide more folate than cooking them.
- Avoid cutting food into small pieces before cooking.
- Steam, boil or simmer food in a minimal amount of water.
- Avoid overcooking.
- Store vegetables in the fridge.

Are you getting enough folate in your diet?

It's important we all get enough folate for healthy growth and development, but particularly for women of childbearing age, to help prevent birth abnormalities such as spina bifida in babies. To get an idea of how much you're eating, do our quiz. The foods in it are all good sources of folate, but the list isn't exhaustive — you may be getting folate from other foods too. Bear in mind that the quiz compares your results with a recommended dietary intake of 200 µg per day, whereas if you're a woman of childbearing age you need at least double this amount. So if you're pregnant, planning to get pregnant, or even if an unplanned pregnancy is a possibility, and you aren't currently taking folic acid supplements, talk to your GP even if you score 35+.

For a more detailed look at how much folate you're getting from your diet, try our online interactive quiz at www.choice.com.au/food.

Read the following questions and decide which response is closest to your eating habits. Then add your scores and check the results to see how you've fared.

1. How often do you eat a serving (about half a cup) of cooked, fresh English spinach or silverbeet?
A) Six or more times a week — score 18
B) Three to five times a week — 12
C) Once or twice a week — 4.5
D) Less than once a week — 1.5
E) Rarely or never — 0

2. How often do you eat a serving of cooked, fresh broccoli (about three quarters of a cup) or Brussels sprouts (about half a cup)?
A) Six or more times a week — score 12
B) Three to five times a week — 8
C) Once or twice a week — 3
D) Less than once a week — 1
E) Rarely or never — 0

3. How often do you eat a serving (about half a cup) of legumes, such as lentils or beans? You might eat these in soups or stews, for example.
A) Six or more times a week — score 30
B) Three to five times a week — 20
C) Once or twice a week — 7.5
D) Less than once a week — 2.5
E) Rarely or never — 0

4. How often do you eat a serving (half a cup) of baked beans?
A) Six or more times a week — score 6
B) Three to five times a week — 4
C) Once or twice a week — 1.5
D) Less than once a week — 0.5
E) Rarely or never — 0

5. How often do you eat a serving (about three quarters of a cup) of breakfast cereal fortified with folate? (To check if the breakfast cereal you eat is fortified with folate, look at the nutrition information panel on the packaging.)
A) Six or more times a week — score 18
B) Three to five times a week — 12
C) Once or twice a week — 4.5
D) Less than once a week — 1.5
E) Rarely or never — 0

6. How often do you eat a slice of bread fortified with folate? (To check if the bread you eat is fortified with folate, look at the nutrition information panel on the packaging.)
A) Six or more times a week — score 12
B) Three to five times a week — 8
C) Once or twice a week — 3
D) Less than once a week — 1
E) Rarely or never — 0

7. How often do you eat a serving of yeast extract such as Vegemite or Marmite. (A serving is 5 g — about half a teaspoon, or a thick scraping on bread.)
A) Six or more times a week — score 18
B) Three to five times a week — 12
C) Once or twice a week — 4.5
D) Less than once a week — 1.5
E) Rarely or never — 0

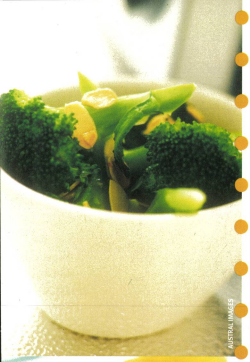
8. How often do you eat an orange or drink *freshly squeezed* orange juice?
A) Six or more times a week — score 6
B) Three to five times a week — 4
C) Once or twice a week — 1.5
D) Less than once a week — 0.5
E) Rarely or never — 0

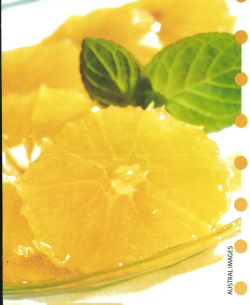
9. How often do you eat a serving (about six spears) of fresh asparagus?
A) Six or more times a week — score 18
B) Three to five times a week — 12
C) Once or twice a week — 4.5
D) Less than once a week — 1.5
E) Rarely or never — 0

10. How often do you eat a serving (about a quarter of a cup) of peanuts?
A) Six or more times a week — score 6
B) Three to five times a week — 4
C) Once or twice a week — 1.5
D) Less than once a week — 0.5
E) Rarely or ever — 0

11. How often do you eat cooked liver (for example in lamb's fry)?
A) Once or twice a week — score 12
B) Less than once a week — 4
C) Rarely or never — 0
(However, it's not good to eat much liver if you're already pregnant — see *Where can I get it?*, page 30.)

12. Do you take a daily supplement/multivitamin that contains folic acid?
A) Supplement contains more than 200 micrograms (µg) of folic acid — score 35
B) Supplement contains 151–200 µg folic acid — 30
C) Supplement contains 101–150 µg folic acid — 25
D) Supplement contains 50–100 µg folic acid — 15
E) Supplement contains less than 50 µg folic acid — 5
F) I don't take a daily supplement/my supplement doesn't contain folic acid — 0





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YOUR RESULTS

35+

Congratulations — it looks as though you're getting the recommended daily intake for folate from your diet. Just remember that variety is the spice of life, and there are all sorts of folate-rich foods you can eat, from green leafy vegetables and oranges to baked beans, Vegemite, Marmite and fortified cereals. Make sure you mix it up. See *Where can I get it?*, page 30, for more.

25–34

Your folate intake is OK, but could be better. Keep eating the foods for which you answered A, B or C, and for a varied and balanced diet, try eating more of the foods where you answered D or E. Use the tips in *Getting the most folate from food*, page 31, to help you along.

LESS THAN 25

You need to try and get more folate in your diet. You should be eating about 200 µg a day, so eating more of the foods that are naturally rich in it will help you meet this target. For a list of foods that can help you boost your folate intake, see *Where can I get it?*, page 30.

Should we add folate to foods?

The Australian government has allowed manufacturers to add folate to bread and breakfast cereals since 1995. This policy is called 'voluntary fortification', and means manufacturers of these products can add folate, but don't have to — though we'd be surprised if they didn't see it as a marketing opportunity to target certain products to women of childbearing age. All foods fortified with folate will list it on the nutrition information panel, and in addition some foods are allowed to make a claim about the health effects of folate on the label.

But the effect of this fortification policy is unclear — an evaluation in 2000 concluded that it was too early to assess the impact of allowing voluntary fortification on the incidence of NTDs.

The problem with the current policy is that the added folate isn't necessarily reaching the people who need it most. If women of childbearing age aren't aware they need more during pregnancy, or aren't planning a pregnancy, it might only be coincidental that they eat folate-fortified food, if at all.

Our food regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), is now assessing mandatory folate fortification (where all food of a specified type must have folate added) as a possible means of reducing the incidence of babies born with NTDs. In the US, the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid was introduced in 1996, and since then there's been a 19% reduction in NTDs.

One potential problem with mandatory fortification that's often raised is the risk to vulnerable people (such as those susceptible to vitamin B_{12} deficiency — see *Can I have too much?*, page 31). But the evidence from the US about B_{12} deficiency since mandatory fortification was introduced has so far shown that this isn't a problem. However, some people are questioning whether there may be long-term safety implications of exposure to high levels of synthetic folic acid, and this needs to be fully investigated.

Mandatory fortification can also add to increasingly skewed perceptions of the food supply, where nutrition education becomes more difficult as it gets harder to distinguish foods that are natural sources of specific nutrients from those that have the nutrients added during processing.

If folate fortification in any form is to continue, CHOICE wants to see appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems put in place to ensure that it has the desired effect of reducing the incidence of NTDs, with no negative outcomes.

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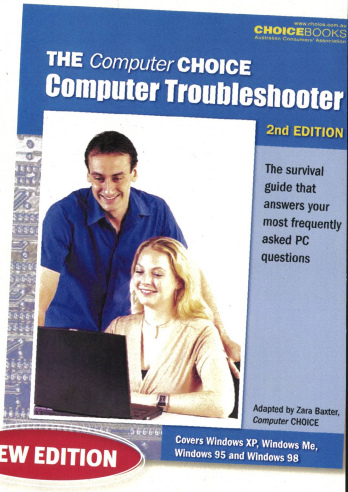
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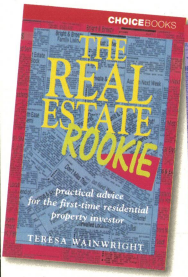
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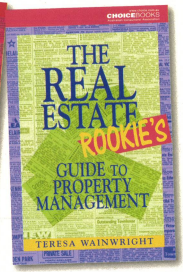

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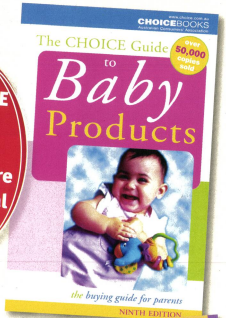

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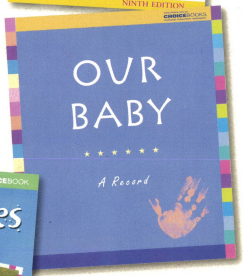

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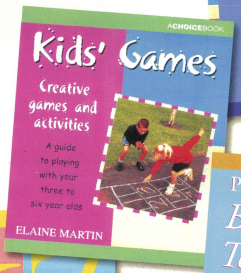

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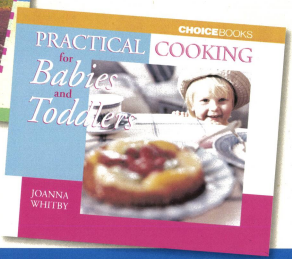

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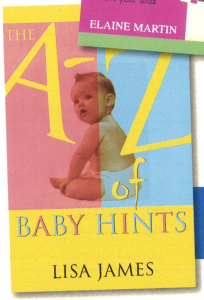

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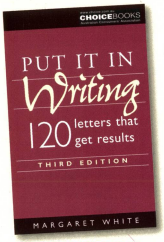

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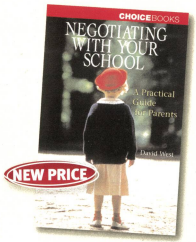

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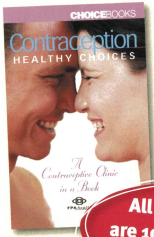

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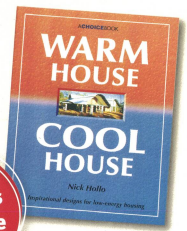

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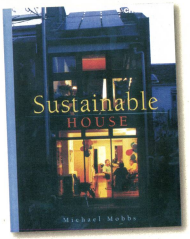

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Look, Mum, no wires!

Wireless internet is the new buzzword in computing — so what is it?

Wireless internet gives you access to the internet without using a telephone line or cable network — you connect using radio frequency bands. A wireless service lets you access the internet when you're away from home or out of the office.

There are several ways you can access the internet wirelessly. There may be some wireless 'hotspots' in your area, or alternatively you may be able to subscribe to a wireless internet service provider (ISP).

WIRELESS HOTSPOTS

Some conventional ISPs, including Telstra, Optus and iPrimus, offer wireless internet access from public places such as cafes, airports and hotels. These designated access points are advertised as 'wireless hotspots' and most use Wi-Fi technology (also called IEEE 802.11) to connect you to the internet. Hotspots are fixed and have a limited range — you need to be within about 100 metres of a location.

To use a Wi-Fi hotspot, you need a Wi-Fi-enabled laptop or PDA. Laptops with Intel's Centrino mobile technology already have Wi-Fi built-in. If your laptop isn't wireless-enabled when you buy it, you need to install a special wireless card, available from computer stores for around $150–$250. This plugs into the card slot on your laptop. When you turn on your computer in a hotspot location, the Wi-Fi card should automatically detect the wireless network.

You'll also have to set up and pay for a wireless account with the ISP supplying the access, unless you're connecting to a free service (see below). You can usually sign monthly contracts or buy a period of wireless access using a credit card or prepaid card, depending on the provider. Wireless hotspot services are generally charged based on the amount of time spent online, rather than the amount of data you use. Prices vary, so check with your provider.

Telstra has wireless hotspots in Sydney Airport and some McDonald's restaurants, Starbucks cafes, hotels and Qantas Club lounges throughout Australia. Optus also has hotspots throughout Australia, including in Gloria Jean's cafes and Sydney Airport. Other ISPs also offer wireless hotspots. A good place to find out where many of them are is www.jiwire.com, but it isn't comprehensive so check individual ISP websites.

It's also worthwhile looking for a free service in your area. Public Networks Australia (PubNet) operates free wireless hotspots at limited locations in Sydney, Bathurst and the Gold Coast. All you need to use the service is a wireless-enabled laptop or device — you don't need an ISP. Go to www.public.net.au to see if there's a PubNet location near you. Other organisations (such as www.wafreenet.org in WA) are also setting up free wireless networks.

WIRELESS ISPS

The alternative to subscribing to a hotspot service that's only available in limited fixed locations is joining a wireless broadband ISP, such as Unwired (www.unwired.com.au) or iBurst (www.iburst.com.au). These ISPs operate their own wireless networks using proprietary technologies that work differently from Wi-Fi.

Both services let you access the internet wirelessly from wherever you are, as long as you're within the network coverage area. You don't need to find designated wireless hotspots, and you can use the same account to connect to the internet wirelessly from your home if it's within the network. This is appealing if you don't want to pay phone line rental fees or you live in an ADSL or cable broadband black hole. Unwired and iBurst provide a special modem (and antenna) that connects your computer to the internet from anywhere within their network, be it your home, a cafe or a park.

The Unwired network currently covers 90% of the Sydney metropolitan area and the company plans to expand throughout Australia. iBurst is currently available in parts of Sydney, Melbourne and Queensland with future coverage planned for Canberra and other capital cities. Check their websites for plans and pricing.

Some other ISPs (Alphalink, SkyNetGlobal W Home and BigAir, for example) also offer residential wireless internet services, but access is limited to your home, so you can't get online when you're out and about.

For more information on the internet and computers, subscribe to *Computer* CHOICE. Call 1800 069 552 or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines. ■

Chill — and save energy

Raised energy efficiency standards mean there'll soon be lots of new fridges on the market. The first few we've tested are very energy-efficient indeed.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **From 2005,** *locally manufactured and imported new fridges will have to conform to much tougher energy efficiency standards — and all nine new models in our latest test are very energy-efficient.*
- **The three new fridges** *that performed particularly well overall in our tests all have electronic temperature controls.*
- **Over 10 years** *it can be cheaper to buy and run a new fridge than to keep running a power-hungry old model.*

As long as your fridge keeps fresh food cold and frozen stuff frozen you probably don't think any more about it beyond maybe whether it looks stylish in your kitchen. Which means when fridges improve, it's easy to miss.

But recently several fridges have been upgraded in electronics and/or energy efficiency — and our lab's kept up with the changes.

We tested nine new fridges ranging in size from 364 L to nearly 600 L that all have at least a four-star energy rating — the likely minimum for fridges with the freezer on top under the new energy standard. Seven of the models tested are from **WESTINGHOUSE** because at the time of testing other brands didn't have fridges available that could meet the standard.

We were particularly impressed by three models that have an extra edge with electronic temperature control.

ELECTRONIC CONTROLS

The top three performers in our test have electronic controls: the **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V, Virtuoso RJ425V** and **Virtuoso RJ525V**. These models provide very good overall temperature management and superior fresh-food cooling times — important if you have a family and put in large loads of groceries at a time. They also have temperature settings displayed in °C on the outside of the freezer door (which ideally would be standard, but isn't).

While the prices for these electronic fridges seem a little higher than for other similar-sized models, they also have extra features including fast cooling, a door alarm and a clock. All of these can be set by electronic controls that are also on the outside of the freezer door. And to top it all off they have two snazzy blue-light stripes down the inside back wall — fun if not functional.

IMPROVED ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Fridges are one of the biggest energy-eating appliances in your home because they operate all the time, so it's worth factoring in the running costs (given in the table, page 43) when you're buying a new one, as well as the purchase price.

The good news is that fridges have become dramatically more efficient over the past 20 years.

And it's not just consumers who've been driving this demand. Since 1999 the government has required fridges (along with freezers) to become more energy-efficient via the Minimum Energy Performance Standard (MEPS), which is a mandated minimum energy efficiency a fridge must achieve before it can be sold.

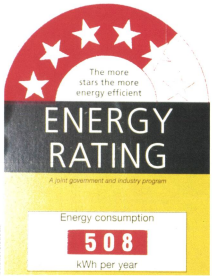
Combined with the energy label with its star rating system that has to be displayed on fridges in shops, MEPS has meant fridges have steadily become more efficient. (See CHOICE, September 2004, for more on how the energy label works.)

From January 1, 2005, the government is raising the bar on MEPS — fridges manufactured or imported after this date will have to be even more energy-efficient before they're allowed to be sold. This could force over 50% improvement in efficiency for some current fridge models.

One example from our current test gives you an idea of just how much fridges have improved. In 1990, the **WESTINGHOUSE RJ525F** was labelled as using 1500 kWh of energy a year to run. In 2004, the **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ525V** — the newest version of this model — sports a label showing just 507 kWh annually. That's around two thirds reduction in energy costs and a saving of around 1000 kg a year of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Put another way, if you're still running a power-hungry older-model fridge like the former, you'd need to plant and maintain at least four trees to make up for the excess CO_2 your fridge is producing compared to these newer models.

But with sales figures also showing we're buying bigger fridges these days, do these bigger models cancel out the environmental savings from the increased efficiency? The answer's no, because fridges are so much more efficient that even if you buy a new, slightly bigger one, you're still likely to be well ahead when it comes to energy conservation.

What does this all add up to? It means if you're hanging on to an old, inefficient fridge it might be time to upgrade soon, as the changes to MEPS from 2005 mean the new ones will significantly lower your running costs. And it's OK to buy a bigger model — provided you really need the extra space — as your running and environmental costs should still be lower than they are now.



TAMARA GRAHAM

The energy label lets you compare energy consumption among fridges of roughly the same size. Once the new MEPS requirements kick in next January (see left), you're likely to see nothing lower than 3.5 stars for fridges with the freezer at the bottom or four stars with the freezer at the top (out of a maximum of six) till the label is readjusted in line with the new MEPS.

WHAT TO BUY

200–299 L	
WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V	$879
300–375 L	
New **WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V**	$1100
376–450 L	
New **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ425V**	$1430
New **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V**	$1321
451–525 L	
New **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ525V**	$1926
More than 525 L	
SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW	$1999
Side-by-side	
WHIRLPOOL Gold 6GD22DCXHW	$3331

These are the best models we've tested in each size range that are still on the market now. At the moment your choice may be particularly limited, as many fridges have been or are about to be discontinued because they have to be replaced by models that meet the new MEPS requirements (see *Improved energy efficiency*, left). The discontinued models are no longer listed in our table on page 42, which explains why so many common brands like **FISHER & PAYKEL** and **KELVINATOR** are missing.

Many of the discontinued models will be available in stores till stock runs out. If you need to buy a fridge in the next few months, go for one of the models listed above or look for a model in the size range you want that has the highest number of stars on the energy label.

Unfortunately, as our table shows, it may be difficult for a while to find models with the freezer at the bottom, especially in smaller sizes.

RECYCLING

If you buy a new Electrolux fridge (**KELVINATOR** or **WESTINGHOUSE**), Electrolux Top Service can remove any brand of old fridge when the new one is delivered. About 80% of the old fridges are sent to a metal recovery centre. The remaining 20% are still operating satisfactorily and are taken by retailers of used appliances.

If you buy another brand it's worth asking the manufacturer whether it provides a similar service.

Profiles

New models in the *What to buy* list are profiled here in rank order within their size ranges. For profiles of the other models in the *What to buy* list, see CHOICE, June 2004, November 2003 and May 2003, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on the relevant article under 'Fridges' in the index. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in August 2004.

300–375 L

WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V

Price: $1100

GOOD POINTS

- Good temperatures on the recommended initial setting.
- Good crisper freshness.
- Lockable mini-drawer keeps kids away from special treats or drugs.

BAD POINTS

- Controls aren't well explained and setting the temperature tends to be trial and error.
- The freezer tends to get much too warm in winter if the room temperature is low, unless controls are reset (and even then it could still be too warm).
- No chiller compartment.
- The door shelf is a bit warmer than the average fridge temperature.

376–450 L

WESTINGHOUSE VIRTUOSO RJ425V

Price: $1430

GOOD POINTS

- Electronic temperature controls are easy to use, show temperatures in °C and have quick-freeze and chill-timer features.
- Controls allow a very good range of temperature combinations between compartments.
- An alarm sounds when the door is left open and/or a fault is detected.
- Very fast fresh-food cooling.
- It handles changes in the external temperature very well.
- Good crisper freshness.
- Lockable mini-drawer.
- Full-width wine rack.

BAD POINTS

- Electronic controls may lose their settings in a blackout.
- No chiller compartment.

376–450 L

WESTINGHOUSE VIRTUOSO RJ395V

Price: $1321

GOOD POINTS

- Electronic temperature controls are easy to use, show temperatures in °C and have quick-freeze and chill-timer features.
- Controls allow a very good range of temperature combinations between compartments.
- Fast fresh-food cooling.
- It handles changes in the external temperature very well.
- Good crisper freshness.
- An alarm sounds when the door is left open and/or a fault is detected.
- Lockable mini-drawer.
- Full-width wine rack.

BAD POINTS

- Electronic controls may lose their settings in a blackout.
- No chiller compartment.
- The bottle shelf in the door is a little warm compared to the rest of fridge.

451–525 L

WESTINGHOUSE VIRTUOSO RJ525V

Price: $1926

GOOD POINTS

- Electronic temperature controls are easy to use, show temperatures in °C and have quick-freeze and chill-timer features.
- Controls allow a very good range of temperature combinations between compartments.
- Fast fresh-food cooling.
- It handles changes in the external temperature very well.
- Good crisper freshness.
- An alarm sounds when the door is left open and/or a fault is detected.
- Among the best for storage versatility.
- Full-width wine rack.
- Lockable mini-drawer.

BAD POINTS

- Electronic controls may lose their settings in a blackout.
- No chiller compartment.

WANT HELP CHOOSING?

To pick a fridge based on the features and performance you're looking for, use our interactive 'Compare-a-product' tool that's available on www.choice extra.com.au for a short time (see 'Fridges' in the index). You'll also find general advice there on choosing and using a fridge.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- Overall, the new **WESTINGHOUSE** models with conventional controls don't match those with electronic controls for performance. In particular, their controls aren't well explained, which means setting the temperature is a bit trial and error. In winter you may not be able to get the freezer compartment as cold as you'd like, especially in the **RJ422V** and **RJ442V**. The **RJ522V** also has a slightly limited temperature range.
- Despite having the best overall energy efficiency of the models we've tested, the **MAYTAG PLUS MB1927** is slow to cool fresh food, has a slightly limited temperature range, confusing temperature-control labelling, and unless the controls are reset, fresh food tends to freeze when the outside temperature drops.
- While it has commercial styling, good energy efficiency and a chiller, the **JENN-AIR JCB-20-BDS**'s pull-out freezer drawer is difficult to use, its freezer temperature control is hard to reach and it has confusing temperature-control labelling and pretty ordinary temperature management. On top of that it's slow to cool fresh food.

For people with a disability

A representative of the Independent Living Centre (NSW) assessed the fridges in our latest test to see which are better for people with various disabilities.

- For wheelchair users a bottom-mounted freezer generally makes both it and the fresh-food compartment easier to use. Of the newly tested models, though, only the **MAYTAG** and **JENN-AIR** have this configuration and they're both very big fridges. Check CHOICE's previous articles for other recommendations (see *Profiles*, far left, for a list of articles).
- If you have upper limb dysfunction, both the **WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V** and **Virtuoso RJ395V** would be the most suitable.
- For people with a visual impairment the **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V, Virtuoso RJ425V** and **Virtuoso RJ525V** are all recommended.
- Someone with a cognitive impairment would find the **WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V, RJ422V, RJ442V** and **RJ522V** easier to use.

TOP TIP

Because the warmest part of the fridge is generally the dairy compartment, this can be a good place for storing ripe tropical fruit and tomatoes, which don't like really cold temperatures.

How reliable have subscribers found them?

In our appliance reliability survey this year around 8000 subscribers told us whether their fridge (all sizes and types bought in or after 1996) had needed repairs in the previous 12 months and whether they'd buy the same brand again.

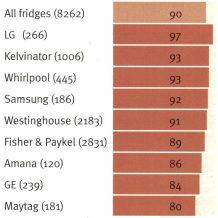
Overall we found fridges were comparatively reliable, with 10% requiring repairs in the previous 12 months. But there was a sliding scale here: only 7% of fridges under 300 L had needed repairs, while 13% of people owning one of the bigger models (over 500 L) had to call in the repairman during the year.

For newer models (up to three years old), subscribers also noted the following problems significantly more often than average for certain brands:

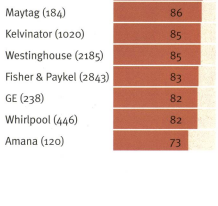
- Icing-up of food: **WESTINGHOUSE** (9%).
- Noise: **FISHER & PAYKEL** (8%).
- Door seal: **KELVINATOR** (7%).
- Handles and fittings: **MAYTAG** (7%) and **FISHER & PAYKEL** (4%), with 5% of latter brand's owners also nominating shelves as a problem.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

(A difference of 6% or more between brands is meaningful. The numbers in brackets show the number of responses; brands with fewer than 100 responses aren't included.)



PERCENTAGE WHO WOULD BUY THE SAME BRAND AGAIN



Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)*	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Temperature performance score (%)*	4 Energy efficiency score (%)	5 Crisper freshness score (%)	6 Cooling score (%)	6 Cooling time (hr:min)	7 Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	8 N leve (dB)
200–299 L									
WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V	72	70	66	85	86	63	5:44	413 / 417	41
SAMSUNG Cool Tech SR-24NME	63	60	60	73	58	63	6:21	508 / 481	38
SAMSUNG Cool Tech SR-21NME	61	60	55	72	58	69	6:04	452 / 473	36
WHIRLPOOL Metro 27 **(A)**	59	67	64	68	12	48	6:57	537 / 543	43
MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC MR255J **(B)**	58	65	63	59	35	45	7:20	587 / 615	38
NEC Fresh Air-Flow FR-236	55	62	45	68	35	67	5:52	580 / 522	39
WESTINGHOUSE RJ212T **(C)**	48	67	33	45	52	65	6:18	593 / 679	39
300–375 L									
† **WESTINGHOUSE** RJ362V	71	70	64	82	84	67	5:02	439 / 493	38
WESTINGHOUSE RJ302V	65	73	50	82	84	64	5:34	424 / 451	44
376–450 L									
† **WESTINGHOUSE** Virtuoso RJ425V **(D)**	80	76	81	82	84	80	3:44	468 / 523	37
† **WESTINGHOUSE** Virtuoso RJ395V **(E)**	78	73	80	79	82	75	4:14	466 / 530	37
† **WESTINGHOUSE** RJ422V	75	73	71	86	80	69	4:39	455 / 477	39
† **WESTINGHOUSE** RJ442V	73	73	66	85	83	69	4:37	486 / 503	41
NEC 3D Cooling FR-405 **(F)**	55	62	45	63	62	59	5:23	660 / 714	43
NEC Fresh Multi-Flow FR358	55	64	45	61	46	66	5.04	628 / 682	40
451–525 L									
† **WESTINGHOUSE** Virtuoso RJ525V **(G)**	80	79	82	81	80	77	3:52	507 / 590	37
† **WESTINGHOUSE** RJ522V	73	76	66	83	80	69	4:28	508 / 569	40
SAMSUNG SR57NXA	69	68	73	71	61	60	5:09	697 / 693	37
NEC FR-480 **(H)**	57	63	46	67	62	61	5:02	675 / 748	46
MORE THAN 525 L									
SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW **(J)**	73	72	64	88	74	79	3:39	604 / 576	40
† **MAYTAG** Plus MB1927 **(K)**	70	74	67	89	92	31	6:48	552 / 533	43
† **JENN-AIR** JCB-20-BDS **(K) (L)**	64	61	60	83	95	31	6:44	614 / 627	42
GE Profile PTU527X **(M)**	63	62	66	60	60	61	4:49	904 / 843	37
SIDE-BY-SIDE									
WHIRLPOOL Gold 6GD22DCXHW	76	70	76	81	89	66	4:31	790 / 811	41
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RS645V **(N)**	61	73	57	63	84	35	6:21	1171 / 1048	44

† *Newly tested models.*

* *Since the last test we've modified the temperature performance score to better reflect how each fridge performs as the room temperature changes. Results for some fridges may be slightly different from previously published scores.*

** *Measured dimensions include hinges and any protrusions at the back, such as the compressor. They're rounded up to the next centimetre.*

‡ *Prices are recommended retail, provided by manufacturers in August 2004.*

na *Not applicable.*

(A) *Tested model stainless steel; available in white, $733.*

(B) *Available in stainless steel, MR255J-ST, $925.*

(C) *Available in stainless steel, RJ213T, $879.*

(D) *Available in stainless steel, RJ423, $1651.*

(E) *Available in stainless steel, RJ393, $1485.*

(F) *Available in platinum finish, $1099.*

(G) *Available in stainless steel, RJ523, $2256.*

(H) *Available in platinum finish, $1199.*

(J) *Available in pewter finish, SRL551DP, $2199.*

(K) *Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores.*

(L) *Available in aluminium with co-ordinated handles, $4599; with integrated handles, trim kit and stainless steel panels, $3999; and integrated handles, trim kit, ready to receive custom panels, $4999.*

(M) *Only available with a stainless steel finish.*

(N) *Has a similar model (cosmetic differences only), Kelvinator M640G, $3742.*

(P) *Chiller was too warm in our test.*

(Q) *With temperature control.*

(S) *Except with stainless steel trim kit.*

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on performance and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Ease of use: 20%
- Crisper freshness: 8%
- Temperature performance: 40%
- Cooling: 12%
- Energy efficiency: 20%

Notes 2–6

Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the articles under 'Fridges' in the index to see what we tested and measured for these scores (under 'Our test').

7 Claimed/measured energy use

The claimed amount of electricity used over one year of normal operation, vs that calculated from our measurements. All the newly tested fridges are very energy-efficient, but when

FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS									COSTS	
hiller	Crisper drawers	Dairy	Remove shelves with door at 90°	9 Door hinge position	Freezer location	Measured dimensions (cm, H x W x D)**	10 Claimed total volume (L)	10 Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	10 Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	11 10-year running costs ($)	Price ($)‡
	1	✓		R or L	Top	155 x 61 x 65	284	209	75	2	Australia	Electrolux	626	879
✓	1			R	Top	155 x 55 x 60	230	163	67	2	Korea	Samsung	722	699
✓ (P)	1			R	Top	145 x 55 x 60	210	143	67	2	Korea	Samsung	710	599
	1			Rev	Top	169 x 56 x 63	269	205	66	2	India	Whirlpool	815	807
✓	1		✓	R	Top	158 x 56 x 62	255	179	76	5	Thailand	Mitsubishi Electric	923	759
✓	1		✓	R	Top	161 x 55 x 60	236	168	68	2	Korea	NEC	783	699
	1			R or L	Top	139 x 51 x 60	218	168	50	2	Australia	Electrolux	1019	604
	1	✓		R or L	Top	164 x 70 x 65	364	273	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	740	1100
	1	✓		R or L	Top	163 x 61 x 65	302	228	75	2	Australia	Electrolux	677	913
	1	✓		R or L	Top	164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	785	1430
	1	✓		R or L	Top	172 x 70 x 65	393	302	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	795	1321
	1	✓		R or L	Top	164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	716	1264
	1	✓		R or L	Top	172 x 70 x 71	442	339	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	755	1485
	1	✓	✓	R or L, rev	Top	172 x 71 x 68	405	280	125	2	Korea	NEC	1071	999
	1			R	Top	173 x 67 x 64	358	260	98	2	Korea	NEC	1023	899
	2	✓		R or L	Top	172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	2	Australia	Electrolux	885	1926
	2	✓		R or L	Top	172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	2	Australia	Electrolux	854	1760
	1			R	Top	182 x 75 x 73	495	349	146	2	Korea	Samsung	1040	1199
	1			L	Top	183 x 76 x 72	506	355	151	2	Korea	NEC	1122	1099
	1			R	Bottom	180 x 83 x 73	551	361	190	2	Korea	Samsung	864	1999
	2	✓		Rev	Bottom	171 x 76 x 79	552	368	184	5	USA	Maytag	800	1999
(Q)	2	✓	✓	Rev (S)	Bottom	179 x 91 x 68	596	411	185	5	USA	Jenn-air / Sampford	941	4299
	1			R	Top	171 x 76 x 73	527	368	160	2	Taiwan	Kleenmaid	1265	2499
(Q)	1	✓		na	LH side	170 x 84 x 83	644	419	225	2	USA	Whirlpool	1217	3331
(Q)	1	✓		na	LH side	172 x 98 x 72	643	407	236	2	Australia	Electrolux	1572	3852

we compared our results with the kWh cited on the energy labels, they were higher by more than 10% for several of the **WESTINGHOUSE** fridges, so we're not entirely confident the labels give you an accurate result. We're discussing this with the manufacturer (Electrolux). Manufacturers whose fridges are measured as using over 10% more electricity than the labelled amount can be asked to explain this discrepancy by the National Appliance and Equipment Energy Efficiency Committee, which is responsible for the administration of the labels.

8 Noise level

We measured the noise level of each fridge from 1 m distance during normal running; more noise is produced when the compressor starts up and also during the defrost cycle. The design of your kitchen and the fridge's location also make a difference to what you'll hear, and you may notice that modern frost-free fridges make more unexpected noises (pops and clicks that can be quite loud) than older models did.

9 Door hinge position

R = on the right; L = on the left; rev = reversible. It's good to have a door that's reversible after purchase in case you move house and/or need to position the fridge differently. While you can do this yourself with some models, manufacturers often recommend getting a service call.

10 Claimed volume

The volume claimed by the manufacturer tells you approximately how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage, especially in a frost-free freezer compartment. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment, so you can choose a fridge that meets your storage needs.

11 10-year running costs

These are calculated at a rate of 15 cents per kWh. A 10-year period provides a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy usage — and you should be able to expect your fridge to last at least that long.

High-powered mowing

The best electric mowers can give you a golf-course-neat yard without the hassles of petrol.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **If you have a small** *to average-sized yard, an electric mower can be a handy and economical way of keeping your lawn looking neat.*
- **Two battery-powered** *models offer most of the advantages of electric mowers without the hassle of a power cord.*

If your yard isn't too big, an electric mower seems like a good idea — they're cheaper to buy and run than most petrol mowers, lightweight and comparatively eco-friendly. The question is, can they also deliver a good-looking lawn?

In this test we took a look at the performance of 10 mains-powered and two battery-powered mowers.

MAKING THE CUT

The top six mowers for performance are all mains-powered and coped well in various conditions, cutting grass of varying lengths neatly and leaving a smooth, clean surface. They scored 88% or more for grass-cutting — see the table, below.

The underpowered **STIGA** tends to dig into the grass, making it harder to push; it struggled in all the cutting tests. And the two hover **FLYMOs**, while cutting short and medium grass well, lost points for flattening long grass and requiring effort to cut it.

But the hover models' biggest downside is that their lack of a catcher leaves the surface of the lawn looking messy, with clumps of clippings — for a neat finish you'd need to rake them up afterwards.

GOOD VIBRATIONS, BUT...

Most of the electric mowers are easy to push (particularly the hover **FLYMOs**) and don't vibrate too much, especially the **ENVIROMOWER**.

Unfortunately, though, a few of them tend to drag when set on their lowest cutting height, making them harder to push. This particularly affected the **STIGA**, but was also notable on the **HONDA**, **OLEO-MAC**, both **MASPORT**s and the **VIKING ME 360**.

Most mowers also lost marks for difficulty changing the cutting height. Only two, the **ENVIROMOWER** and the **TANDEM**, have a height-adjustment lever that adjusts all four wheels at once — pretty much a standard feature on petrol mowers.

		PERFORMANCE				SPECIFICATIONS		
Brand / model (in rank order)	**Type**	**1 Overall score** (%)	**2 Cutting performance score** (%)	**3 Ease of use score** (%)	**Noise at 7.5 m / user's position** (dB)	**4 Number of cutting positions**	**4 Cutting height range** (mm)	**Width of** (mm)
VIKING Linea.E ME 410	Electric wheeled	81	92	64	63 / 78	7	34–76	410
TANDEM Prima 1400	Electric wheeled	79	90	63	57 / 73	9	17–69	380
ENVIROMOWER ECO500 ES-360A	Battery-powered wheeled **(A)**	78	82	73	60 / 74	6	26–77 **(B)**	350
FLYMO RE 370 U371EL	Electric wheeled	78	88	64	59 / 73	6	16–66	370
MASPORT Phoenix 38	Electric wheeled	78	88	63	58 / 74	3	21–56	385
HONDA HRE370	Electric wheeled	77	88	60	65 / 80	3	23–55	370
OLEO-MAC Serie K K40P	Electric wheeled	77	88	60	65 / 80	3	26–58	370
MASPORT Phoenix Cordless	Battery-powered wheeled	76	78	73	64 / 80	3	26–61	380
VIKING Linea.E ME 360	Electric wheeled	71	78	61	53 / 69	3	24–56	325
FLYMO Turbo 400 TL400	Electric hover	66	68	63	64 / 85	5	5–31 **(C)**	405
FLYMO Turbo Lite E 330	Electric hover	63	64	62	64 / 86	4	10–29 **(C)**	330
STIGA Silent 33 Electric	Electric wheeled	62	66	57	56 / 71	4	22–52	325

WHAT TO BUY

VIKING Linea.E ME 410	$399
TANDEM Prima 1400	$349
ENVIROMOWER ECO500 †	$649
FLYMO RE370	$299
MASPORT Phoenix 38	$329
HONDA HRE370	$359
OLEO-MAC Serie K K40P	$337
MASPORT Phoenix Cordless †	$449

† *Battery-powered.*

PHOTOS: GEOFF VASILEFF

BATTERY vs MAINS

The biggest hassle using an electric mower is having to manoeuvre around the power cord as you mow (and the limit it sets on how far you can go), so a major question is: can a battery-powered model deliver as well? The two battery mowers in our test rated well and both are recommended, with our testers finding them easier to use than the mains-powered models. But while they cut short grass well, they did start to get slower as the grass got longer.

Of the two, the **ENVIROMOWER** has the greater battery capacity: when cutting short to medium-length dense buffalo grass it lasted 60 minutes and cut approximately 1570 square metres (m^2) of grass. The **MASPORT** lasted 30 minutes and cut 620 m^2. While the **ENVIROMOWER** will mow for longer, it costs $200 more, so your choice is likely to depend on the size of your lawn; both mowers should be OK for a small to average-sized suburban yard.

The biggest downside to a battery-powered model is that you have to plan ahead to use it, as it takes 12 hours to fully charge the **ENVIROMOWER** and 24–30 hours for the **MASPORT Cordless**.

THE VERDICT

Don't underestimate an electric mower if you have an average-sized suburban lawn. Most of the models tested are powerful enough to cope easily with different lengths and types of grass, and they'll save you the hassle of keeping petrol at home — as long as you can get used to cutting with a power cord. If not, the perfect compromise could be a battery-powered model.

						COSTS	
ght	Catcher supplied	Extension cord supplied	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Replacement costs, blade / catcher ($)	Price ($)*
	✓		1 **(D)**	Austria	Stihl	24.50 / 86.00	399
	✓	20 m	1	South Africa	Tandem Lawnmowers	21.50 / 68.00	349
	✓	na	2	Taiwan	Enviromower	24.95 / 19.95 **(E)**	649
	✓		1	England	Electrolux	35.00 / 69.00	299
	✓		1	Italy	Masport	17.00 / 49.00 **(E)**	329
	✓		1	Europe	Honda	40.75 / 30.75 **(E)**	359
	✓	20 m	3	Italy	Parklands Trading	33.60 / 89.00	337
	✓	na	1	Italy	Masport	17.00 / 49.00 **(E)**	449
	✓		1 **(D)**	Austria	Stihl	30.00 / **(F)**	299
			1	England	Electrolux	35.00 / na	299
			1	England	Electrolux	35.00 / na	249
	✓	16 m	2	Sweden	All Power	40.00 / 120.00	299

SAFETY NOTE

While all the mowers passed our electrical safety tests, if you choose a mains-powered electric mower you also need to buy a safety switch for the power outlet you use for the mower (unless your whole home is already protected). It will automatically cut the current if you run over the cord or have a similar accident.

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of cutting performance and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Cutting performance: 60%
- Ease of use: 40%

2 Cutting performance score

This score includes assessment of cutting short, medium and long grass and the appearance of the short and medium grass after cutting.

3 Ease of use score

The following were weighted equally:

- Vibration.
- Pushing and manoeuvring.
- Controls.
- Cutting height adjustment.
- Catcher.
- Handle comfort.
- Convenience of the power source.

4 Number of cutting positions/cutting height

By adjusting the height of the mower's blade above the grass you set the length of grass to be cut. These columns show both the number of positions available and the range of approximate lengths of grass you can cut to.

The cutting heights shown aren't the exact length of grass you'll get, as we measured the distance between the blade and the bottom of the wheels, but it gives you an idea of the differences between models. If your lawn is very overgrown, a mower with a comparatively low maximum cutting height will probably have more trouble cutting it.

* *Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manfacturers in August/September 2004.*

na Not applicable.

(A) *Catcher and mulcher mower; the rest aren't mulchers.*

(B) *The manufacturer says it's phasing in a modification that will lower the cutting height to 16–75 mm.*

(C) *Cutting height will be higher due to hover effect.*

(D) *Three years for polymer deck, one month for cutting attachment.*

(E) *Flexible mesh catcher.*

(F) *Viking told us it doesn't currently have a 'price structure' for this catcher.*

Profiles

Mowers in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in August/September 2004.

VIKING ME 410

Price: $399

Mains-powered mower with wheels and catcher.

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent cutting performance.
- Only a small amount of vibration.
- Large catcher capacity.

BAD POINTS

- Two levels to adjust the cutting height, which are stiff to operate, and the settings are hard to see.

TANDEM PRIMA 1400

Price: $349

Mains-powered mower with wheels and catcher.

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent cutting performance.
- Easy to adjust the cutting height with a single lever.
- Only a small amount of vibration.
- Reasonable catcher capacity.
- Extension cord supplied.

BAD POINTS

- Doesn't cut very close to a vertical edge on the right-hand side.

ENVIROMOWER ECO500

Price: $649

Battery-powered wheeled mower, with both catcher and mulcher modes.

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cutting performance.
- Very good battery capacity.
- Very little vibration.
- Reasonably large catcher capacity.
- Easy to adjust cutting height with a single lever.

BAD POINTS

- Doesn't cut very close to a vertical edge.

FLYMO RE370

Price: $299

Mains-powered mower with wheels and catcher.

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cutting performance.
- Only a small amount of vibration.
- Reasonably large catcher capacity.

BAD POINTS

- To change cutting height, a lever at each wheel must be moved.

Petrol, mains power or battery?

The performance of the electric and battery-powered models in this test compared well with most petrol mowers we've tested in the past, so your choice depends on how their pros and cons line up for your yard.

PETROL

Good points

- Generally the best cutting performance, though many electric models now come close.
- Often have a wider cutting diameter, making mowing faster.
- The best choice if you have a large area to mow.

Bad points

- Can be a hassle to start and refuel, and you have to store petrol at home somewhere.
- Ongoing petrol costs.
- Eco black mark #1: Petrol mowers produce more pollution than electric mowers.
- Eco black mark #2: Because two-stroke mowers burn oil and petrol, they're more polluting than four-strokes, producing around twice the carbon monoxide and four times the hydrocarbons.
- They're noisy, often heavy and can be tiring to push.

ELECTRIC (mains-powered)

Good points

- Small and lightweight, making cutting easier with some models.
- Fewer breakdowns reported than for petrol models in CHOICE's last reliability survey on mowers.
- Quiet, with less vibration.
- Less polluting than petrol.

Bad points

- Manoeuvring can be difficult with an extension cord, and the area you can mow is restricted by its length.
- Mowing can be more time-consuming, as many have a smaller cutting diameter than petrol mowers.
- The cutting height is difficult to set on most models we tested.
- Some are so lightweight they bounce when mowing.
- You have to add the cost of an extension cord and safety switch to the purchase price for most.

BATTERY

Good points

- Generally the same advantages as electric models, though we don't have reliability data for battery-powered mowers.
- Mowing isn't limited by the area the power cord can reach.
- No concerns with becoming entangled in or cutting through the power cord.
- The two tested have enough battery capacity to mow most suburban yards.

Bad points

- You have to remember to charge the battery around 12–24 hours before use.
- Mowing can be more time-consuming, as the two we've seen have a smaller cutting diameter than petrol mowers.

MASPORT PHOENIX 38

Price: $329

Mains-powered mower with wheels and catcher.

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cutting performance.
- Reasonable catcher capacity.

BAD POINTS

- Very limited number of cutting height settings.
- To change cutting height, the mower must be turned over and a spring-loaded axle bar moved to another slot.
- The axle can jump out of the slot when the mower is pulled backwards.
- When set to the lowest cutting height, the body drags on the grass, making it hard to push.

HONDA HRE370

Price: $359

Mains-powered mower with wheels and catcher.

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cutting performance.
- Only a small amount of vibration.
- Reasonable catcher capacity.

BAD POINTS

- Very limited number of cutting height settings.
- Not easy to adjust the cutting height, as you have to remove all the wheels to make the change.
- When set to the lowest cutting height, the body drags on the grass, making it hard to push.

OLEO-MAC K40P

Price: $337

Mains-powered mower with wheels and catcher.

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cutting performance.
- Only a small amount of vibration.
- Reasonable catcher capacity.
- Extension cord supplied.

BAD POINTS

- Very limited number of cutting height settings.
- Not easy to adjust the cutting height, as you have to remove all the wheels to make the change.
- When set to the lowest cutting height, the body drags on the grass, making it hard to push.

MASPORT PHOENIX CORDLESS

Price: $449

Battery-powered mower with wheels and catcher.

GOOD POINTS

- Good cutting performance.
- Good battery capacity.
- Only a small amount of vibration.
- Reasonable catcher capacity.

BAD POINTS

- Very limited number of cutting height settings.
- To change the cutting height, the mower must be turned over and a spring-loaded axle bar moved to another slot.
- The axle can jump out of the slot when the mower is pulled backwards.
- When set to the lowest cutting height, the body drags on the grass, making it hard to push.

BRUCE HAMPTON

We need to cut our test grass in August to be able to report in CHOICE in time for spring and summer. With CHOICE based in Sydney, that's not a good time for grass-growing. So our testers head for Cairns. It seems there's nothing like those balmy, tropical conditions to make grass grow fast and long all year round, so these mowers were tested in the most rigorous conditions far north Queensland has to offer.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The **VIKING ME360** cuts grass well but only has a small catcher, and when set on the lowest cutting height the body drags on the grass, making it hard to push.
- The **FLYMO Turbo 400** and **Turbo 330** hover mowers cut short and medium-length grass well, but flattened long grass and required effort to cut it. Their lack of a catcher also leaves the lawn looking messy unless you rake it after mowing.
- The **STIGA Silent 33 Electric** isn't very powerful, has few cutting height settings and is so light it tends to bounce around when mowing.

A FIRST FOR FOOD REGULATION

In April this year, the NSW Food Authority was established. It's the first agency in Australia to have responsibility for regulating a state's entire food industry, from primary production to point of sale.

The NSW Food Authority recently set up a Consumer and Industry Contact Centre. It provides consumers with information on issues such as food safety and labelling, and also welcomes enquiries and complaints about products, unsafe practices and labelling issues.

The NSW Food Authority is also interested to hear from consumers who are aware of any business engaging in fish substitution or mislabelling of fish (as described in *What's that fish?*, CHOICE, July 2004).

If you spot anything in NSW that you think the Food Authority should know about, call its Consumer and Industry Contact Centre on 1300 552 406 or email contact@foodauthority.nsw.gov.au.

Cereal offenders?

When we reported on breakfast cereals in May 2003, we weren't impressed with many of the kids' cereals on offer — most contained too much sugar and/or too little fibre. Since then, we've noticed an increase in the number of cereals aimed at kids on the supermarket shelves, particularly chocolate-flavoured ones. We thought we'd take a closer look, to see how they rate when compared to our cereal standards (see notes 1–4, below).

All the cereals we looked at except one have too much sugar and too little fibre to be recommended for every day. The exception is **KELLOGG'S Mini-Wheats Milk Choc Flavour**: a moderate source of fibre and not too high in sugar. But don't rush out and buy lots of boxes — it's quite high in fat, so it's still not ideal as a regular breakfast.

KELLOGG'S Cocoa Crispix not only contains too much sugar and not enough fibre, it's also high in sodium. This is the part of salt you need to watch, whatever your age. Too much is associated with raised blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

As an occasional treat these cereals are fine — and better than no breakfast at all. They all have added vitamins and minerals, so can make a significant contribution to a kid's diet in that way. But we'd like to see manufacturers produce more cereals that aren't just fun for kids to eat but good for them too.

1 Low fibre
✗ = Less than 5% fibre (less than 1.5 g in a 30 g serve).

2 High sugar
✗ = 27% to 40% sugar (two to three teaspoons in a 30 g serve).

3 High fat
✗ = More than 9% fat (more than 2.7 g in a 30 g serve).

4 High sodium
✗ = More than 600 mg sodium per 100 g of cereal, which amounts to 30% or more of the lower recommended daily sodium intake for four to seven year-olds (and at least 20% for kids aged eight and over) in just one 30 g serve.

Breakfast cereal (in order of fibre content, highest to lowest)	1 Low fibre	2 High sugar	3 High fat	4 High sodium
KELLOGG'S Mini-Wheats Milk Choc Flavour			✗	
KELLOGG'S Coco Pops K*Pows	✗	✗		
KELLOGG'S Nutri-Grain Choc Malt	✗	✗		
NESTLÉ Milo	✗	✗		
KELLOGG'S Cocoa Crispix	✗	✗		✗

Sweet tooth

Q: Are all sugars bad for your teeth? What about fruit sugars?

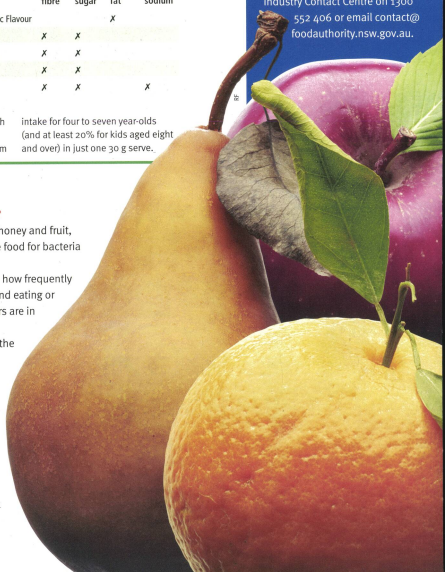
A: All sugars, including naturally occurring ones like those in honey and fruit, have the potential to be harmful to teeth. They can all provide food for bacteria that make acid that attacks teeth.

How long the sugars stay in your mouth is important, as is how frequently you eat or drink. Sticky foods, sugary between-meal snacks and eating or drinking snacks over several hours all increase the time sugars are in contact with your teeth and the risk of decay.

Even starchy foods that can be broken down into sugar in the mouth can be a problem for teeth if they hang around long enough for breakdown to start.

In addition to the sugars they contain, acidic drinks like soft drinks (even many 'diet' ones) and sports drinks can cause tooth problems by eroding the enamel of teeth if you sip them over a long period. Fruit juice can do this too if you let it stay in contact with your teeth for a while by sipping it slowly. It's better for your teeth to drink sugary and/or acidic drinks quickly.

The sugars in milk aren't as tooth-unfriendly because milk contains other protective factors.



recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Consumer Safety Unit on (02) 6263 2747.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

MEDICINE: Apisant has recalled **Mavala Eyelite Eye Drops**, all batches, AUST R 12374.
The problem: It fails to meet the relevant standard for preservative efficacy.
What to do: Stop using it immediately. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (02) 9643 2444 to arrange its return and a refund.

FOOD: F Mayer Imports has recalled **Royal Line Smoked Salmon**, in a 100 g vacuum pack, use-by date 04/09/2004, lot code 2272F, country of origin Denmark (Dansti Foods), sold in NSW (Sydney metro).
The problem: High levels of the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes* have been detected. It may cause damage to the foetus in pregnant women and illness in the very young, the elderly and people with low immune systems.
What to do: If you froze it for later use, don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call 1800 211 787.

FOOD: Conga Foods has recalled **Green Valley Spanish Black Pitted Olives**, in a 350 g glass jar, lot code 01V27 C-1870 on the lid and outer carton, country of origin Spain, sold in the ACT, NSW, Tasmania and Victoria.
The problem: Glass fragments have been found in some jars.
What to do: Don't eat them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (03) 9487 9500 for more information.

FOOD: Susan Day Cakes has recalled **Susan Day Chocolate Chip Muffins**, a 300 g pack of four on a plastic tray, best-before date 04 Sep 04, packed: 215.
The problem: Small pieces of metal and plastic have been found in some packets.
What to do: If you froze them for later use, don't eat them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 812 116 for more information.

FOOD: Goodman Fielder Consumer Foods has recalled **Paul Newman's Own Light Honey Mustard Dressing**, in a 250 mL glass bottle, best-before date 23 Jun 2005, country of origin Australia.
The problem: It contains undeclared milk protein.
What to do: If you suffer from a milk protein allergy or lactose intolerance, don't eat it. Return the product, or unused portions of it, to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call 1800 638 112.

FOOD: David Jones has recalled **Charbonnel et Walker Truffes Chocolat Champagne** and **Charbonnel et Walker Pink Champagne Truffles** in a round, 130 g box, lot code DJ0604, best-before date Dec 04, country of origin United Kingdom.
The problem: It contains undeclared wheat protein.
What to do: If you suffer from a wheat protein allergy or intolerance, don't eat them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call (02) 9266 5647.

HOT WATER BOTTLE: Coles Myer Supermarkets has recalled **Deluxe Hot Water Bottle**, in pink or deep blue/purple, with batch code 04 inside an embossed circle on the bottle neck, sold in Coles after April 1, 2004.
The problem: It has been manufactured from faulty material that may cause the bottle to split in the neck region, creating a potential scalding hazard.
What to do: Don't use it. Return it to your nearest Coles for a refund, or call 1800 061 562 for more information.

TOY: Red Dot Stores has recalled a **spring-loaded children's umbrella**, item UM 1834, barcode 9328710018346, sold in WA.
The problem: It doesn't meet the prohibition order for children's toy umbrellas.
What to do: Immediately remove it from children's reach and return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

KEYRING: Very Special Kids has recalled **Very Special Kids Piggy Bank Appeal Key Ring**, sold at Tattersall's and Tatts Pokies in Victoria from August 25, 2004. It's a merchandise item sold as part of the Victorian charity's 2004 Piggy Bank Appeal.
The problem: It's made up of small parts that can come apart, posing a choking hazard for small children.
What to do: Immediately remove it from children's reach and call 1800 888 875 to arrange its return and a refund.

COMPUTER ADAPTOR: IBM Australia has recalled **ELV adaptor** for IBM ThinkPad iSeries, 390 and 240 series, and sSeries notebook computers, machine types 1161, 1171, 2621, 2651, 2627, 2609, 2624, 2626, 2666 and 2667, shipped between January 1999 and August 2000. The adaptors have the IBM part number 02K6549 and three hollow metal pins in the mains input connector on the adaptor brick.
The problem: The adaptor may overheat and melt the adaptor housing and char the circuit board inside the housing.
What to do: Unplug the adaptor from the wall electrical outlet when unattended. If it shows any sign of overheating when plugged in, immediately unplug it and notify IBM to arrange for a replacement. Go to the replacement website at www.adapterprogram.com or call 131 426 (select option 1) between 9 am and 7 pm (EST) Monday to Friday.

COMPUTER BATTERY: Apple Computer Australia has recalled **Macintosh PowerBook Batteries** for use with Macintosh PowerBook notebook computers, model number A1045, serial number range HQ404-408.
The problem: The batteries may overheat and damage the computer. Overheated batteries also pose a fire hazard.
What to do: Apple is contacting known customers to arrange provision of a replacement battery. For more information call 133 622 or go to www.apple.com.au/support/.

TYRE: Bridgestone Australia has recalled **Bridgestone motor vehicle tyre**, Dueler A/T 693 pattern with the Bridgestone brand on its sidewall. It has a DOT serial code starting EJ LF CCB, is size LT285/75R16 122/119Q, manufactured in Japan between July 1, 1998, and July 31, 2002. It's mainly fitted to larger four-wheel-drive vehicles.
The problem: The belt may detach, especially if operated outside recommended minimum and maximum inflation pressures for the load carried by the tyre.
What to do: Call 1800 354 864 to arrange an inspection.

CAR: Land Rover Australia has recalled **Land Rover Discovery Series II-Td5**, model years MY2001 to MY2004, VIN range LT736101 to LT865281.
The problem: The rear fuel line may chafe against the ABS/water sensor harness and fuel pump harness. Prolonged chafing could result in a fuel leak from the main fuel feed line, which could lead to the vehicle failing to start.
What to do: Contact your authorised Land Rover dealer, or call 1800 809 308 for more information.

CAR: Kia Automotive Australia has recalled **Kia Rio hatch** and **sedan**, both automatic and manual models, produced from May 26, 2000, to March 26, 2004. The vehicle identification number (VIN) ranges affected are:

- Hatch automatic: KNADC243316508639–KNADC243316528409, KNADC243316011211–KNADC243346220598.
- Hatch manual: KNADC243216508638–KNADC243216528408, KNADC243216011214–KNADC243246220607.
- Sedan automatic: KNADC223316508641–KNADC223316528863, KNADC223316012712–KNADC223346335367.
- Sedan manual: KNADC223216508640–KNADC223216528870, KNADC223216011361–KNADC223246335365.

The VIN is on your registration papers.
The problem: The fuel distribution rail may crack, resulting in a fuel leak, which may cause a fire in the engine compartment.
What to do: Contact an authorised Kia dealer to arrange for inspection and rectification work to be carried out. For more information call 1800 600 010.

aboutchoice

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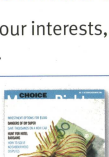

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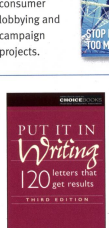

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*** Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.**

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Body-building Skip Rope

The medical science certificates that the foots are the root of the body which gathering six passages and many acu-puncture points.Skipping can promote the blood circulation and regulate bodily functions,making the brain being in the exciting condition.It plays a role of clearing the brain and building the body.Skipping frequently could strengthen the vigor of the brain cells and improve the ability of thinking.

But does it cure cancer?

PROBABLY NOT A BAD IDEA ...

Seeing a doctor can be quite useful during pregnancy and childbirth. And while you're at it, you might also consider booking your birthing suite, waitlisting for childcare and buying the *CHOICE Guide to Baby Products*...

As if August isn't already long enough ...

We've seen February 30s and April 31s sneak into the calendar, but August 32?

Catalogue Sale Starts THURSDAY 26TH AUGUST
FRI SAT SUN
27 28 29
THUR MON TUES WED
26 30 31 32
On sale at selected stores, see page 6. For 1 week only unless sold out earlier.

UP TO 4.40% P.A. INTEREST

AwardSaver Account

Put a little bit away often. Kick-start your savings with up to 4.40% p.a. interest when you make at least one deposit and no withdrawals during a calendar month. Plus, there are no account keeping fees.[1]

accessed on 13 2221. 1. Standard plus bonus interest rates currently range from 2.61% p.a. for balances less than $5,000 to 4.40% p.a. for balances of $100,000 and over, but are subject to change without notice. Bank fees and government charges may apply. 2. The special interest rate current as at 5 July 2004 is subject to change but will be maintained at least 0.10% p.a. above the highest Cash Management Call Account (CMCA) interest rate. On 1 November 2004, the interest rate will revert to

Not interested, thanks

If you want to benefit from the full 4.40% interest, you'll have to put a little away *very* often — until you've accumulated $100,000. For amounts less than $5000, it's only 2.61%.

At last ... Say goodbye to shaving & waxing at an affordable price!

Upper Lip only $60

Lip & Chin only $100

Goodbye and good riddance

Ah yes, don't we all hate affordable prices?

100% COW PATTY

Where exactly does the "100% beef patty" come into it? Even the ingredients list says it's only 60% beef. We're perplexed.

INGREDIENTS:
Sesame Seed Bun: Unbleached Bakers Flour (Wheat), Water, Sugar, Yeast, Vegetable Oil, Sesame Seeds, Gluten, Salt, Soya Flour, Emulsifiers (471, 472e, 481), Preservative (282), Vitamin (Thiamin). Meat Patty (42%): Beef (60%), Textured Soy Protein, Soy Protein, Breadcrumb (Unbleached Flour, Unbleached Wholemeal Flour, Bakers Yeast, Salt, Vegetable Oil, Gluten, Thiamin), Meat Extract, Soya Flour, Emulsifiers (481, 471), Sugar, Preservative (223), Vitamin (Thiamin), Enzyme (1100). Mineral Salt (451). Processed Beef.

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for best entry goes to M Nelson. Thanks to G Marshall, R Thomas, S Butlin, W Smith, V Murphy, G Willis, K Hampton, H Singleton, Z Rajczyk, K Spratt, M Cranwell, K Booth, P Lewis, M Nelson and L Kingston for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.